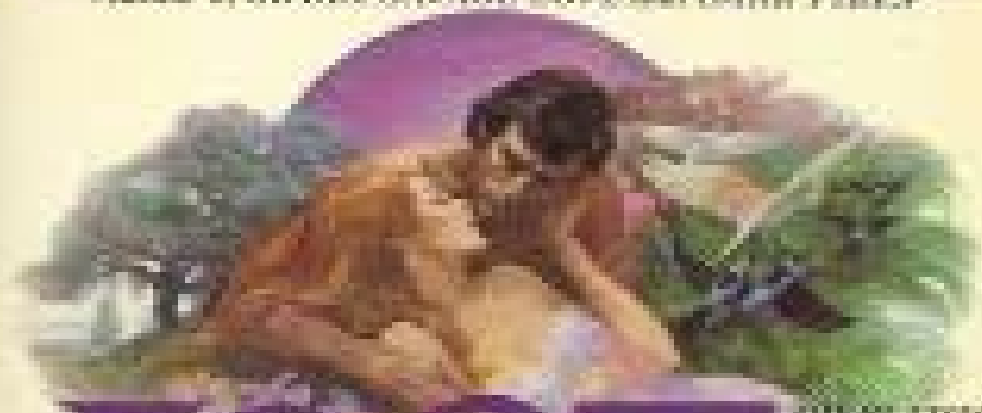




ROSEMARY ROGERS

Author of SEVEN SEVEN LOVE and DARK FIRES



LOST LOVE, LAST LOVE

FOR AN EYEING
COURTSHIP
TO THE
TRUMPETING
ARRIVAL OF
FANCY
FASHION AND
STREET MODERNITY

Chapter 1

Even amid the well attended, richly attired, who attended the grand ball of the opera, they seemed isolated from the rest. Californian millionaire adventurer was tall, blue eyes and his lovely wife bronzed hair. Certainly a couple exceptionally beautiful, but it was not all. It was his sudden appearance in New Orleans giving him rope loosened tongues and gossip.

The truth is that everyone knew that Virginia was the stepdaughter Brandon Morgan Beaudine Sonya, also from New Orleans. And almost everyone had heard the story, which was much more than a rumor-of Steven Morgan's relationship with some Italian opera singer exploiting his wife's trip to Europe, recently.

- Is it true that they married a few months after she left a widow? Widow of a Russian prince, they said the papers, right?

"I heard he had a son while he was in Europe. What has made the poor creature? Do you think he knows?

"I assure you, my dear, I would not be in his shoes if that's true and he comes to find out. It seems very moderate and harmless, right? The lady who spoke so exaggeratedly shivered without ceasing to look at Steven Morgan. I could not help thinking what it be like to be his wife. Although it was not possible to trust him a hair, it was still exciting ...

"I think, dear, that are the subject of much speculation.

Green, exactly the color of emeralds shone flashed her eyes looking sideways, accompanying the glance with a smile.

The dance steps separated and met Ginny and Steven again and again.

- Has begun to worry about?

"No, I guess that will always gossiping about us. Why should I worry?

"Bravo," his voice was slightly mocking to show he looked beyond

his apparent aplomb.

"I care a damn," said Ginny defiantly but seeing her eyebrows raised, she gave a brief smile. Well, OK, I like being in a window, that's all. I swear some of those old scarecrows, tonight lorgnette point more toward us than toward the stage. Steven, why do we come from?

"My dear, at some point we would have to appear in public. And tonight I must confess that you are especially attractive. And that Madame Elise has had to make the costume in a jiffy.

As his fingers pressed against hers, she studied her critically.

- Do you like me more so?

"You're a provocative ramerita're dressed or naked. And, you know!

I saw her at that moment through his blue eyes narrowed as he had seen in the last month they spent together traveling through the marshes. With tangled hair, half naked, like an Amazon green-eyed, gun holstered to his side and the knife in the other ... she, his wife-lover.

Were much hated, much as had been fought and loved! Yet could you ever be sure of each other? They had been married more than four years without being really together even half of that time.

"Are we really know each other? Ginny asked himself back at him, knowing instinctively that he was thinking the same thing. What will become of us in four years? "There were many questions I'd better not be. At least not now ... not yet. The opera singer ... I would have loved? Did he think still have lovers? Would she be able to keep it? And if they have children? The children could affect their relationship in a thousand ways that she could not imagine.

"They seem to be fused into one another. It's almost embarrassing to see a married couple look that way to each other. Do you think ...? I mean ... all those stories, gossip ... Do you think it might be true?

- Of course they are true!

The speaker, an old lady, almost suffocated by the weight of the diamonds that covered his chest, "he gasped. Basically Mrs. Pruett suggestive sigh liked his young companion, and his way of opening his eyes as he leaned toward her to not miss a syllable. "I knew Sonya Beaudine," Mrs. Pruett "Actually, I remember when ...

It was cut, as if he had been talking to herself, realizing that he was accompanied.

"Well, say I remember many things ... As for the gossip, dear, certainly true. Look, less than a year ago was here to hear him sing his mistress. The theater was coming down with applause. What a voice!

"But ... but what about your wife? They seem to be so in love ...

"And they are," Mrs. Pruett indulgently, why not? They say he married a few months of her widowhood. The husband was nothing short of a Russian prince. I am convinced that they are a very modern young couple. At least so they say.

Not only the ladies of New Orleans were dedicated to make comments. Knights also seemed happy to admire the French almost Madame Morgan.

- Too bad you're married! What a wonderful eyes!

- And what price figure! I imagine that shirt is adorable ...

"You better watch out the language, Andre, dear. They say the husband is dangerous man. Rumor ...

"Ah, yes. We've all heard the gossip. And also about her. When I was in Paris last year, I had occasion to meet the lovely Ginette on some occasions. Each time with a different guard. Was all the rage at that time. It was said that Count D'Arling, a former lover of his, was about to leave his young bride for her. Ginny finally went to London with an English duke. I wonder if the husband be informed.

Lucian Valette, who mockingly was addressed the last question, he shrugged. He was accustomed to things of his friend and knew of his fondness for pretty women. Especially if they were of another.

And Andre was an excellent marksman, trained by the famous Pepe Llulla. Needless to say that the game was officially banned. But here in New Orleans, the honor code very slowly extinguished and the authorities were always willing to turn a blind eye when they were duels.

"My friend, what does it matter to anyone? As you can see they are together and seem very happy. And while we, Bernard Pruett looks happy tonight. Do you think it will be because Pennington has decided Althea beautiful smile?

The shoulders of another gentleman ushered in the well-fitting frock coat. They were broad and muscular shoulders that were languishing at several pairs of female eyes staring in their direction. From which he pretended not to notice.

"You're looking husband and little Bernard has more money than talent. However it would be better to convince him to elope with her, before the beast of his mother realizes what is coming.

While slightly touched his mustache, a smile appeared almost cruel in the eyes of the tricksters and talked.

"La Mère Pruett will not approve a ochomesino never inherit the millions of Pruett. And if Althea is wise enough to follow my advice, everything will be fine.

Valette acute glanced at his friend, not allowed to say anything.

But inwardly, they warned. "So that was how things were? Not even two months ago in the midst of a binge, he had bet on Andre that the only woman who never get carried to bed, was the lovely Althea Pennington. The spoiled, loved and well-guarded daughter of an irascible Yankee banker. Did he really have taken the bet on and was now looking for Miss Pennington husband "in trouble"?

Andre never lied in the case of his conquests. I did not need to.

Women flocked to him like flies to honey, and only his reputation as a good shooter had prevented deceived husbands parents and will challenge him to a duel.

"So I owe you one of my bays eh? He said shrugging his shoulders resignedly. I should have known. Hell, you have an infernal luck

with women! I wonder if there are any that you can not beat.

"If this is a new bet, Lucian, accepted. For your other bay. Let's see who could be this time? Perhaps a married woman. It's always harder to get, especially if their husbands are not too old. Choose one, but please be nice. You know I'm quite fussy about it.

At that time the dance ended and Steven Morgan led his wife to a chair. From across the room, a whole phalanx of bejeweled matrons watching them critically.

"Well, the truth is it's very nice to her. We must grant that claim, I think.

"In public, my dear. Are not we all present? The truth is that it is a very handsome man. The dark complexion gives him a devilish air. Do you think she will pass the whole night dancing with his wife?
- Marie-Clair Valmont! You're not waiting to take her daughter to dance? He is a married man ...

Madame Valmont smiled involvement to which he spoke, his "best" friend, she said.

"That is, Agatha. It is much safer to dance with a married man in the eyes of his wife as a conqueror inveterate Andre Delery.

The poignancy of the phrase Agatha blushed.

-Andre Delery formally courted my Therèse as you know. And my husband was fired ...

- Yes? Then he seemed distressed when the next day when I accompany Thierry Rose to a private dinner at Antoine's. And speaking of Therèse 'when will our beloved Therese de France? The poor must be boring in Provence ... You said you are with your grandmother?

A blonde woman, still attractive in his thirties, was dancing with her husband, an elegant older man. He greeted the ladies as they pass and returned the greeting with some tricks, some more than others to conceal his surprise.

- Dear Sonya! It looks much older than when he left here right? Will the hair still blond naturally?

- What to really feel the gift of meeting a stepdaughter grandma

can do it anytime? Poor Sonya! Do you remember when we were all that outstanding young officer, so handsome, who escorted everywhere?

- Oh yes! One who had a duel with his command with a mestiza shot ... do not you? She used to say that I hated him for the insolence with which he looked, but I ...

"Yes, yes. Everyone said it was protesting too hard a time Mind you do not you think that your son has a certain air of Yankee captain? The coal black hair and eyes ...

"I think Amelia, who has spent considerable time dealing with the Yankee," interrupted Mrs. Pruett bitterly "Since we're friends of Sonya would not it be better to entertain us to deal and resume the relationship, instead of stirring old gossip ?

- Good is it to criticize! Mutter another lady behind the fan. He said softly, because Mrs. Pruett managed to handle them all, thanks to money from her husband and his arrogance.

- Some of these ladies have snakes in your tongue! Sonya whispered excitedly to her husband once left behind prying eyes. She wanted to not make me come. Ginny and Steven are accustomed to talk of them. Sometimes I think that deliberately provoke the gossip of all kinds. But I was born in New Orleans, I know most people dislike me.

"My dear, you know perfectly well that that is why we are here. Because you know everyone and see you as if you were one of them.

William leaned forward, smiling at his wife and gave her a reassuring handshake. Intimately worried. Sonya It was not quite so difficult. Persuade her to come, had taken a new diamond bracelet. He had thought he would like to meet old friends again. But their protests were so vehement that, against his will, had been forced to be rude to her. Why were women so unpredictable, even after several years of marriage? He was not after all too many reasons for wanting to visit New Orleans, a city that always reminded him of his first wife, Genevieve. The lovely and fragile

Genevieve whom he loved with the burning passion of first love- his first love never paid, despite the docility that showed him at first. I cried every time I tried to make love, no matter how loving and tender to display. In the end he got dared not even touch it. Senator William Brandon-Brandon-made an effort to forget the past. Better not return to it. It was a pragmatic man, very ambitious, sharp and full of political management. Just received a telegram from his son-in-law from Shreveport, thought it would be a good policy to come to New Orleans to give some respectability to his daughter's reunion with the good society, after his hasty trip to Europe that had raised so many gossip. The senator said lips imperceptibly. A lesser man used to dominating his features were frowning. He had to seek an early opportunity to talk to Virginia. I was quite shocked at some comments that Sonya had done after she returned from Paris. And the fact that Texas had gone by without having the courtesy to even tell that he was back in the country ... He was surprised that Steven would have brought back. But that was naturally a matter of Steven.

"William, I'm starting to feel a little tired. Please sit down.

"You're starting to fret Do not you're getting grumpy?

The voice sounded slightly harsh and Sonya tried to smile.

- Of course not! It is true that he would not come and still not feel entirely comfortable here, but here we are, after all! And mind you, Ginny has decided to sit a while I'm sure you like me so thirsty.

"A very charming man, Senator. And so handsome! Virginia is, right?

The gossip of the ladies favored the senator. Even Mrs. Pruett was pleased to smile and nod.

"He's been lucky to get a second husband even more handsome than the first. Remember Raul Beaudine? He was as handsome as savage.

Sonya Brandon sat next to his stepdaughter. Neither had much to say once made proper compliments on their dresses. Sonya had

chosen a pink satin that looked almost as dark red. Ginny's dress, very tight to their shapes and with a rather daring neckline was turquoise silk, inspired blend of blue and green.

Sonya thought that one of the things he disliked his air of arrogant Ginny was almost unconscious. His air of not caring a whit the views or feelings of others. "It has always been selfish and will remain so," thought Sonya. Does not care what they may say it. And as for him ... "

Ginny had turned to laugh in the face of a young man who was flitting around to talk. Sonya recognized him as Lucian Valette, the son of an old friend, older than her, "because Madame Valette was of another generation.

Would they have been formally introduced? It was really in bad taste by Ginny, allowing many families to a virtual stranger and engaging him in conversation in a low voice that obviously had a lot of courtship. "The truth is that Steven's fault. If I had not left to roam around Europe meanwhile enjoy his mistress in public ... "

Sonya the choppy reflections were interrupted by the same Steven that, for disgust, merely observing the obvious courtship of his wife with another man, raising his eyebrows in amusement.

Belle-mère.

He bowed ceremoniously to Sonya blushed with rage How dare? He knew very well that infuriated him to address it publicly calling her mother. And he knew how I hated him, how he ...

Sonya later thought that only the anger had been responsible for him paralyzed tongue, preventing him from making the negative proud he was to respond. He invited her to dance, helping him stand. William, misinterpreting his desperate eyes, she only smiled making a nod.

"Damn!" Sonya almost never cursed, but now the words you circled the head. The last time they had danced together in New Orleans. On one occasion I could not forget, despite having tried with all his might. It was in the governor's mansion and he was in uniform. How I had hated him that night! I had tried to go on

hating, even when in bed, his hands roamed her body as his tormented voice told him "Sonya, darling! Damn! Why should he be forced to remember?

Sonya was the fervent hope that nobody else would remember.

Adeline Pruett had piercing eyes and a good memory. This was too well how Adeline was insinuating that, after all, there was nothing wrong with a little fun if it retained the discretion. Why could not women have fun as well as men?

Oh, God! It seemed impossible that she had a passionate relationship with the man who, by one of those ironic turns of life, had become her husband. No, it was ironic, was monstrous!

Sonya, trying to maintain his composure, he said coldly

"I hope not intend to force me to dance this dance. I'm such a hypocrite like you. Do not have a conscience?

He also remembered his sarcastic smile.

"You should know I do not know why you ask me, dear Sonya. Or do you want me to call her belle mère?

Almost gasping breathing. And I would have tried to move away if their arms have not been pushing so hard.

"I'd rather sit for the duration of the dance. Please!

"No Please worth.

For a moment, frowned, gathering his black eyebrows. After apologizing surprised:

"Sorry, Sonya. I invited her to dance not to provoke her. But since it seems we will have to live for a while is not it convenient for a truce?

- Is that all I had to tell me?

By answering it appeared some wrinkles around the eyes:

"No, not exactly. Bush wanted to ask some questions.

Sonya felt that his smile was like a mask that concealed his senses something else divined in him a tension that frightened her. He remained silent as he continued:

"You know now and almost everybody, right?

It was a question I did not understand then or understand in a long

time and even when followed by finding out, almost mockingly, who was who among the crowd of people around them. Why did I want to know so much?

Chapter 2

"My dear, I do not so obviously demonstrated by your displeasure," he said kindly Steven William Brandon, later in his room.

She was brushing her hair until it cracked. Her voice was affected and stubborn:

"Sorry, William, I am not hypocritical. It was inviting me to dance. He knows very well that I have never forgiven their way to deceive and humiliate us, even if you've decided to forgive.

Sometimes with certain malignancy Sonya wanted to drop everything to purge their sins. Steven Morgan's arrogance, his way of assuming she would agree to give all the information you would like to get from his friends, was truly unbearable. Why did you marry precisely with Ginny? And why had to reappear, after being mysteriously vanished in recent months?

Sonya had to make a huge effort to sit still lying in bed, instead of rummaging through the sheets, even after her husband had stayed quiet and rhythmic breathing. It was unbearable! Intolerable that she was back in his former home, lying in bed with four columns that brought back so many memories. "I should have insisted on selling the plantation, he thought feverishly. And I should not have ever returned. She had the feeling that something terrible would happen, something dreadful it will destroy their lives. Steven Morgan always brought trouble. With or without scandal, Ginny would have been better had he remained in Europe.

Two doors down, Ginny could not sleep. Steven Damn, where is? He had made love and, after giving him a light kiss, without giving any explanation had left the room. Where had he gone?

"More than an hour ago that he thought it was unintentionally. But

I'm not going to cut to get up to get him. I would say do not trust him and would have a fight. "Would you be angry with her for having flirted with the handsome young man who was Lucian Valette? He had not said a word afterwards, even when she reproached her for having done so angry Sonya.

There was only built one of their diabolical black eyebrows.

- How? Why ask her to dance? It is very stubborn, still has not forgiven me.

"Well, I do not know if I've forgiven you ... When I think ...

"I also remember many things, love.

What did he mean by that? The problem is that were not yet enough time together. And they were too anxious to avoid fights to be honest and clarify the past. They loved each other but what love was enough to assure a long marriage? Would they bored each other, to hate each other perhaps?

Ginny had left open the window and saw a gust of wind stirred the curtains. He got up, crossed the room and stood looking out. Even the breeze was hot that night! Swift heard the sound of wind passing through the trees surrounding the house. Like the endless ocean crashing against the breakers at the foot of the porch of the house of Monterrey. The house where Steven had taken after killing Ivan on the Russian ship's deck.

Even now, the memory of blood and violence Ginny shuddered, remembering the perverse part of Steven's personality. On which the Paco Davis had warned for so long. How he hated to Steven that day! How he screamed, cried and threatened not stop feeling so scared all the time!

He seemed still to hear Steven's voice sounded harsh and inflexible.

"You're a drug addict, you know what you mean? No more dust, no more sleeping tonic. You will not need them from now on. Already you will notice.

It was the beginning of a nightmare that she thought would not ever finish. Why I had to remember everything, just now, when

that painful past was so far from the two?

Ginny closed her eyes trying not to think about anything. But the night seemed made for the memories and the warm wind down her body as if fingers hovering over your skin, returning again and again the sound of the ocean, dragging more and more into the past ...

In a past where he was sometimes shaken by chills and other burning heat, their bodies covered in sweat. I could feel every inch of her skin itched as if he were nailing thousands of fine needles into the flesh. She tossed the covers that appeared caught between its little folds, fending off screaming aimed hold hands. It sometimes seemed that he would break his head, others that it is slowly pressed an iron band. She was being tortured and it was he who deliberately tortured.

- Want to kill me! You're destroying as you have destroyed you! By God, do not touch me, touch me not!

Her hair had lost its shine and fell in dull, damp mop on the face and neck. When I tried to tear them out in droves, bound his wrists to the bed posts.

I did swallow liquids, bland foods that immediately vomited. He screamed until his throat hurt leaving only the wailing that seemed more animal than human.

"Do not touch me until he was hoarse murmur sleeping. No, oh no! I hate you, you're going to kill me too ...

They came distant voices of people talking in hushed tones without being able to understand what they said. He felt that approached her hands that sometimes seemed cruel and loving others. They were trying to hear that but no one listened to her, nobody cared about it. She wanted to die but also granted him the privilege. Sometimes he dreamed about when I was too exhausted to continue fighting, lying on the unmade bed, listening to the voices that never silent.

- God! Are you sure there is no way to cure it? This is agony and the truth is that I do not know how long I can keep holding on. If I

had known ...

"That's pretty much to bear. And so will you if you decide to get some sleep and eat something. She is not going to die, that I can assure you.

- That's what you can guarantee? What the hell does that mean? I warn you, Doctor, that if something happens ...

- God! I order you to leave this room. If you want to fulfill the task for which I paid, I better start obeying my instructions, sir. I have tried many similar cases during the period of absolute deprivation of the drug is necessary for the patient enjoy as calmly as possible. She starts screaming as soon as you approach. For me it is obvious that ...

For two days they knew nothing about it. He left the room and the house also. He returned in the afternoon of the third day unshaven and without explanation. Dr. Matthews greeted him with a quick smile.

She is better. Gone are the seizures and begins feeding again. Just a thought but ... I think you would be wise to wait until tomorrow to see it.

- Are you trying to say tactfully that can fall into hysterics if I get to see?

Steven Morgan rubbed his silky beard that covered his jaws with nervous fingers. The doctor, who had observed the wrinkles of fatigue, stress, bloodshot eyes that betrayed a lot of alcohol consumed and little sleep, went for a noncommittal shrug.

"It's his wife and of course, the problem between you is not my business. But speaking as a doctor I must say that seems to need a little rest. An irritating emotional scene at the moment ...

"He's right. At this point I would be very hard to control myself. Good evening, doctor. Excuse me tomorrow and I promise to introduce a more decent.

Ginny heard the sound of voices. Unconsciously was alert to every sound, from the sound of horses' hoofs passing under his window and the voices of the cowboys, had warned him that he was back.

He was so weak! So as he was dispossessed of all-energy and capacity for emotion, still felt his heart beat too fast, somewhat sickly and fearful anticipation, at once. "They kept whispering voices or was it just her imagination? He heard footsteps and a bang that reverberated far in his sleeping brain. "He would break into the room, hard blue eyes like sapphires, burning with hatred or anger? Or would be so devoid of feeling like yours?

His room - was also once of him? - Was something apart from the rest of the house. It was built in a slightly lower level, in what looked like a carved niche in the huge coastal mountains falling steeply to the ocean. To get from the lounge to the bedroom, had to pass through a covered balcony with wooden floor, which opened on the gardens, unless the huge shutters were closed.

All these things I knew because they had been told the nurse who had drawn even a plane. Looked down the narrow beach in a half moon that seemed to be at the bottom of the windows covering one entire side of the room. He had seen the foam breaking in the surf to get rid then with deceptive gentleness against the black rocks, sliding suggestively on the beach.

"Just outside is a beautiful terrace. When you are better able to sit there and enjoy the sun and fresh air.

When was better? Why had he been ill? What had they done? He still had bruises around the wrists to remind him that he had been tied to the bed like a captive animal. Tortured. And it was he who had ordered and had been sitting beside her watching her suffer day after day, without emotion when called for the release order.

"If I had even a little ... For pain, I can not stand, he will kill me ...

If I am going to kill why not do with it? Why?

He believed that he removed his facial hair whispering tender words to comfort her. But it was only for show so that others see him, the doctor and nurse. Why could not she remember it all?

Why some things appear so blurry and undefined?

Ginny moved impatiently under the light coverlet, wanting to throw down. But if it did, the nurse would appear with clucking

and tut it would again.

Was he really on a ranch in Monterrey, or in a private sanatorium, one of those nursing homes with that Ivan had threatened once? Ivan ... No! By God, no! It was a memory that was not yet able to cope. Steven had killed him. How horrible! But why? Why? He thought he heard footsteps and quickly closed his eyes, trying to regain normal breathing. The footsteps stopped at the door and then walked away. Steps long, angry strides. Steps predator. Paco's voice recalled Davis, a long, long time ... How much? "Those guerrillas are not barracks and Steven is the worst. I could tell you many things ... "

But was not told anything. And he had to learn on their own. Ginny waited knowing he would come, not knowing how she would feel it. Finally, the nurse only came with a bowl of hot broth and optimistic professional smile on the white round face.

- Are you still awake? Well, well ... And we who thought he was sleeping. You need rest, you know. And her husband has returned. It will cheer when they see it much better right? I'll sit down and help gonna take every last drop of broth. For when tomorrow comes you'll see a little color in her cheeks.

The nurse Adams continued his pep talk while Ginny forced to end the "dinner".

Why was this woman to talk so much? Why was treated like a child? I was tempted to make a scene and throw the soup into his face, demanding to be let up. But that needed a lot of effort and, much to his regret, he was feeling sleepy again. Since it had started to realize what was happening around him, all I wanted was sleep. To be sitting seemed too great a strain.

He would not see her that night. Do not want to come. He was so casual that he had passed out ... how many days would have been? And now preferred to postpone the match as much as possible. You may be wondering what he was doing with her now that she had. It was an unpleasant and unwanted responsibility. After all a mistress is something else. An instrument of pleasure, easy to

discard without drawbacks when it was heavy. But a wife ...

That spoke the next morning when I finally went to see Steven. He took her to the terrace from which both had told him but he had not seen before.

Shaven, small red scar that had been cut with the knife, was cutting a fine line that only make it more attractive to women who were always lurking. More than ever like a pirate. But his manners were those of a very well educated abroad.

He had placed in a chair and asked him if he was comfortable. But he sat down and chose to stay leaning carelessly against the wrought iron railing looking into the rocky cliffs above the ocean. Her eyes, slightly crossed in the light of morning sun, were the color of the ocean when it meets the sky beyond the breakers. So unfathomable that it was impossible to guess what was behind them. Suddenly he realized he did not know how to address it or how to act. What did it now?

The nurse Adams had brushed her hair to make back some of its former glory and had tied back with a green ribbon that matched her braided ribbons passing through the eyelets embroidered lace gown. Ginny had been looking at hand mirror the nurse argued: hazel green eyes seemed deficient in the whiteness of the face where the cheek bones sticking out too. He was excessively pale and ugly. He had the fleeting vision of the face and glistening golden Concepcion, her lips curved in a smile of triumph.

"Stephen and I are people of the same ilk. We can understand ... "

Steve and he could not understand, if they ever had. When he looked so impersonal there, anger or passion in his voice. Without realizing chin up taking a gesture of rebellion.

"I am delighted that you are better. Maybe now we can talk a little.

- About what? Surly tone, "he said. I'm sure you're all determined.

"I have not received enough punishment?

- Punished! "For a moment her eyes sparkled, but regaining control over himself, he added:" I thought by now you'd realize why I brought you here.

- To torture me! I know how far you can get when you're angry, or is it that you have already forgotten? I do not understand is why not let me go. You ...

"You have been tortured.

Still the same tone control.

"You were going way to becoming an addict of opium. And this was the only way ... Ginny, I've seen what happens to people who acquire the habit. I've been to slums where opium is smoked, full of human skeletons that escape from hell to another without power and realize that they are still alive. The cure is painful and I am sorry you had to endure. But now you are safe or, at least, is what the doctor tells me.

- You should have let me die! It would have been more convenient, is not it?

"You're being unreasonable, Ginny.

- You mean I should still be 'cured'? Are you going to keep me captive forever or just until it appeases the scandal? Oh, for goodness sake! I wish that for once you were honest with me. What will happen now, Steven? A divorce after a discreet interval? Or turn me away to a quiet place where you can forget ...?

- I have not forgotten anything! And neither, apparently. But there will be no divorce, Ginny. Not yet, at least. Within a month we're getting married again to welcome the public. In the church, brought before the altar for your father. And with half of San Francisco invited after the reception. For a time will be the subject of gossip that you married a few months of widowhood. And before you say that was my mistress. But it is better to be called a bigamist is not it, dear? Over time talking and will accept it. Steven, who was uncivilized himself had called "a civilized settlement"! Just to avoid a scandal remarry. Their only obligation would appear to be a happy wife for several months.

"I gave my word to Count Chernikoff that would let you leave for Europe within a year. Then you decide on divorce.

- And until then, what?

Ginny's voice was almost a whisper. All I hope is that he did not realize what he had white knuckles because both hold onto the chair arms.

"Until then I propose that we try to keep up appearances. I will try to be away most of the time. I'm sure you'll feel more comfortable as well. One year, Ginny. I'll see that you have enough money to feel independent, regardless what you decide later.

She spoke with a tone so reasonable with both practicality and coolness so what choice he had, indeed, her?

- What about your beloved? Ginny asked later.

He raised his eyebrows quizzically.

"And your lovers, what's up?

Leaning back in his chair, Steven looked at him inscrutable.

"I hope, my dear, we'll be smart enough to show off a good deal of discretion. Between them we have enough to talk about why we do not give opportunity to talk about something else?

Sitting opposite each other at the headwaters of the huge dining room table lit by candelabra, two characters seemed disconnected from a plot impossible. Less than a year there had been entertained at dinner. No, just a month earlier, he had carried on a litter to her bedroom amid feeble protests. But now, as they were about to appear in public as husband and wife, had erected a barrier between them and none of them could, or would like to overcome it.

Both "Alta California" as "Chronicle" had described the wedding in detail. The titles of the last said:

«First marriage of the daughter of Senator Brandon for the Catholic Church

The more conservative, "Alta California", referred to the bride as "The Princess Sahrkanov recent widow," reminding his readers of a maritime accident that had killed the prince. But both newspapers agreed that the couple formed a couple exceptionally beautiful and in the reception hosted by the father of the bride after the ceremony, had been magnificent. More splendid even

than that offered some millionaire from New York to celebrate the wedding of his daughter with an English couple.

The Rincon Hill mansion glowed with lights and dancing continued until dawn, ending with a surprise breakfast at the Plaza Hotel. So after breakfast the couple did the traditional "break", based in a magnificent carriage specially commissioned from England, drawn by a pair of race horses.

Tired to exhaustion, with a tremendous headache caused by excessive tension and champagne, Ginny fell asleep and could barely mutter some unintelligible words when, stopping the carriage, Steven picked her up and went upstairs.

When he awoke, his first thought was that I was still dreaming Where was I? What had happened? She was alone, lying in a massive carved mahogany bed, wearing a light green silk gown that reached to her feet. The evening must have been quite advanced. Through the window that occupied the entire wall, came a faint violet light. Someone had lit the fire in the room and the glow of the flames mingling with the light of day he had.

Slowly back the memories, weak and fuzzy at first, bringing a sense of apprehension.

Actually she had married-again-with Steven. This wedding was even more unreal than the first: the glow of the candles on the altar, the chorus, his trembling to say yes ... The Steven sounded louder and emotionless. With the same lack of emotion after he brushed his lips.

Later, during the reception, had told the hearing:

"I know it can be very good actress. Remember that we appear so in love that we could not wait any longer to get married. You are able to represent much better than you are.

"And you ... I notice that you turn away from Concepción hard time. All this reminds me too much to our "first" marriage.

His eyes looked at her lazily.

- What a good memory you have, dear! I'd like to compare 'this' marriage to the last 'yours' ...

Before I could answer, forced to dance with him, so tight it took her breath before the end of the dance. After that ... then he had not left her for a moment, entirely devoted to playing the role of love and caring boyfriend. How dare she talk to her about what was to represent!

And now ... Ginny sat on the bed, frowning in an effort to remember. She had fallen asleep just as they were alone in the car, her head resting on his shoulder. Steven had his arm around ... what then? She thought she remembered that he had carried in the arms, the sound of a word and the sound of a door open with his foot. Who had undressed and lying? Suddenly she felt that red. How ridiculous! It had to be forewarned against this feeling of weakness that seemed to dominate for a while. Now remember that bed and that room. Steven had brought her here before and, at that time had almost raped, her body become an instrument of punishment and anger. There was no question of trusting him blindly as before, only because the night before had tried, friendly, almost gently. He knew what he was doing at the moment it suited him to keep it docile and happy.

Ginny tugged at the bell and then stretched languidly. Whatever the reason, the fact is that Steven had taken as his wife in the eyes of the world. They had made a deal and this time he would not have hurt her. No, I find her a loving wife and accommodating! He had forced the situation for reasons of convenience. It was possible that his father had anything to do with it. Well, she would play its role to the end. We would see if he liked!

Ginny shuddered annoying, trying to cling to the past present and trapped by their dreams. Trapped by marriage and by the vacuum that existed between the two. It was only nine months had returned to San Francisco from the Peninsula, after their honeymoon and for the first time, they were surrounded by people. While the maid was preparing the room, Mrs. Morgan enjoyed an intimate dinner with her husband on the terrace surrounded by crystals. From there one could see the city and the curved path leading to the sea, the

ships with the lights on to fend off the darkness.

Occasionally, especially in times like that, when the two were alone Ginny felt invaded by a feeling of unreality. Was it possible that he was married to Steven and that they would still two strangers? He could talk about business matters, to laugh with her and tease her. But the tension did not disappear between them.

"I have gotten bored of me, Ginny thought as he stretched his hand to lift the glass of white wine placed beside the plate. It was silly of me to expect that ... "But what did you expected? What I had asked Steven to stay with him, being precisely he who had made all arrangements for her to travel to Europe? He had decided after that horrible weekend party at the home of an actress. Almost all male guests had brought their mistresses, but he insisted on taking her.

- Why not? I know everybody. It can be fun. And do not think I'm going to get jealous if you decide to go upstairs with that blonde who attracted your attention so the other night.

Hearing this he raised his eyebrows.

- You mean I either have to show me jealous? I knew very well that you have many admirers among the friends of Mme.

- Oh! She said with a shrug. At least they're real people. I'm tired of hypocrites and pretend to be respectable when in fact I'm not. He roared with laughter. But not laughing at all when climbing the stairs of the house of the actress, angry and impatient and found kissing in the top of the stairs with a young man named Peter. It was an English actor well known. She had allowed him only to kiss her, to heal his wounded pride over its refusal to spend the night with him.

Surprised to feel so guilty and embarrassed, Ginny had tried to break away from the hug, too tight, young. After all, she thought she was trying to justify-left Steven alone with the same madam. They had gone to the terrace and had already been there for some time when Peter the whole night had been talking in my ear, "I offered her to her room.

Steven was the only one who looked puzzled. The expression of anger that had few minutes before had vanished, giving way to a wave of cold sarcasm as he made a ceremonious bow.

"Sorry for the interruption, my dear. Just wanted to wish you a happy night.

She spent a very unpleasant night, unable to sleep, all alone. After the incident was quickly got rid of Peter. Steven met again at breakfast time, well into the day, none of them made any reference to what happened the night before and without wondering how he had passed.

"I make love, but never told me he loves me, thought Ginny. That brief and happy season they had spent in Mexico, the two penniless, sleeping everywhere as if they were in season, now seemed like a dream. And he loved her. But it was a short-lived love. I tried not to remember how he had killed Ivan. Fortunately, also "that" seemed impossible, like a nightmare. It was not jealousy. Steven was no longer jealous. I just wanted to claim his own. And now, less than a year after formally married because she was tired of it and, since last weekend, had shared the room. In a flash of anger, Ginny said, "It would be unforgivable to let him see me. If nothing remains of the girl I once was, at least I keep the pride.

He had spent some time in the sun, his face had regained some of their former golden peach color and shone in the candlelight. Mysterious and enigmatic hazel green eyes looked while playing with the wine glass that suddenly took the empty mouth in one gulp.

- Is it some secret toast to yourself? Why Russia, France, for the old memories?

The vessel was holding Ginny crashed into the fireplace while it faced a challenging look.

- Why would a drink in honor of the memories? The past is dead, I prefer to think of the future.

"I had told him," Steven said dryly, and we drank together.

For a moment he felt the desire to give a kick to the table between them, squeezing his arms and lay her down on the carpet, possessing among the scattered pieces of pottery and glass. That would force her to admit ... to admit that, for the love of God? That she was the kind of woman that answered the caress of any man, provided they are imposed by force. I could not help thinking that was all his fault. Too selfish to think about the future of the young woman a thousand ways had thrown to the wolves. If I had given up the infernal pride and jealousy blinded him, never fell into the hands of Carl Hoskins or Sahrkanov Ivan. Neither of the drugs she used to forget. Now she blamed everything and the rational part of his being understood the reasons.

When I was half mad by the lack of opium, screaming their hatred and mistrust, had promised to be patient with her. This time it would force anything. The freedom would make more complete and return to him voluntarily, without coercion. But things had not proceeded as he expected.

She was a dear and a consummate lover, but it was the woman who once offered her neck to strangle her hands, while she said she loved him. Neither medium tame this creature that confronted him with a knife.

The best thing was that they separated soon. The two needed off to be redone.

The time ... Suddenly it seemed passing too fast, as the landscape visible from the windows of private cars, luxuriously built for the new railway linking the coast of a vast continent.

They owned shares of both railroads, the Central and Union Pacific, and across America in cars as comfortable as if they were on holiday somewhere for the summer.

Only recently, Steven had given her some shares and Ginny was part-owner of the landscape for days and nights, constantly changing through the windows.

Unless the Senator and Sonya, spent much time alone in the luxury car that was reserved for them. Steven was almost always playing

poker with some relationships he had found and, once, the night before arriving in New York, he thought it smelled like cheap perfume for women, when, quite drunk, kissed her good night to wish formally.

Ginny was wide awake and angry when he heard separate the heavy velvet curtains. Stiffened, resolutely closing his eyes when he bent toward her.

- Are you playing the lady offended, dear Ginny? Do not feel ...

And I'm too tired to think about rape you. So ... good night.

Steven's lips, warm and slightly mocking, touched his forehead and slid into the earlobe. He had a diabolical power to excite! It would have been welcomed in the spacious and comfortable bunk if only to fight with him all night. But he left. Also it had had to become accustomed in recent months.

They slept in separate rooms and, when they went to bed together, it seemed that Steven possessed only because I had another woman on hand to satisfy their uncontrolled desires. And that was usually when the two had left and returned tired after drinking too much. They made love like animals, seeking oblivion in both passion without feeling. He no longer looked as it did before when I said put down:

- I want you, Ginny, and if you take your clothes and ...!

No, now stripped the girl that helped him put on his robes and nightgowns expensive fabrics and light. When Steven came to her coming-if it was at the time that she had just fell asleep or was too tired to protest. And then, almost immediately, leaving again. He preferred to sleep alone, so she had no doubt. Yes, Ginny knew by heart what was said by the city, saying the women who envied because Steven took her everywhere and treated her as if she were his mistress and not his wife. To Sonya, his features a little hardened, commented that it was quite rare.

The truth is that the fault was his. From the beginning he had told Steven that he would not allow the wife treat her as a fool.

"Since we have reached an agreement, the settlement must be

even. I see no reason for you to have all the advantages. I also want to have fun.

To his surprise, there was no fun at all, but had died before admitting it. Above all before him. He carried it everywhere and tried in public as his mistress. But it was not even that.

Within a short time would be sailing to Europe. Even the idea that he would meet the Czar of Russia who was possibly daughter was able to get her out of her strange state of depression.

As usual, the depression was Ginny brilliant display to others. They would spend a week in New York. High society conquered by assault. It was not just a rich woman married to a handsome young man and always feminine object of curiosity, it was also half French, intelligent and well educated.

From San Francisco had come many rumors about the young couple. In New York they wondered what was true in those rumors. Nobody could tell. Even the writing on rough tracks, which was limited to information that bribing the servants were getting.

Steven Morgan, tall, fierce-looking, with a scar on his face to give more than talk to the gossips ("He was beaten several times, here and in Europe ..." According to openly have mistresses were already dying before the first husband of it "), was on a business trip in New York with his father. His lovely young wife would soon be leaving to Europe with his stepmother. In public seemed very happy and well-matched. Privately ... But who knew what was going on in the privacy of the "suite" of his book? Ever since they arrived in New York, Ginny had just seen her husband except in some public function. I spent my days with Sonya, shopping or making visits. He ended his night when the lights of dawn was breaking, and barely longer had the strength to jump into bed. When not being seen to act to others, Steven, behaved as if she already was gone. Even his occasional desire to possess it seemed to have vanished. Never once had entered her room. If breakfast, he did it alone. To not humiliate avoided asking where Ginny had

been the first day.

"Mr. Morgan said you could sleep until the time he wanted, ma'am. He went out very early.

Ginny had insisted on keeping Delia as a maid, which had finally learned to have a face inscrutable. As Tillie undoubtedly had told some stories, seemed to have a little afraid to Steven. And Ginny was not going to lower asking questions.

I felt the time was slipping by hitting it in passing. Sonya Even before he could show his feelings. Much less to Steven, who stole precious hours that could have happened to her. Ginny was now sure that I could not wait to see her go. It had been a foolishly foolish to expect that he would ask her to stay.

There was a great feast in his honor-what-snobs called a soiree the night before his departure for Paris. The party was held at the Grand Ballroom of the hotel where they stayed, with over five hundred guests. But the morning papers spoke of "an exclusive intimate gathering of friends. Ginny hardly know anyone.

He was with nerves, trying to hide his state of mind by dint of laughing and flirting with all their dance partners. Last night they had gone to an intimate party and came back after breakfast. He had not seen Steven until he entered unexpectedly in her room when she was stirring the jeweler to decide what was going to get with your new tan moire dress.

"You're making everyone wait, dear.

With distracted gesture Aztec offered her a necklace. Once he had seen a similar model in a museum and he loved. It was gold and inlaid stones, with such a jewel, I did not use any other jewelry. It fit perfectly around his neck and came down to the bare neckline of her dress. It was divine and rich; would be the envy of all the ladies present.

- Oh, Steven! "She gasped.

He laughed.

"Let's gratitude for later. Now it's better to go down.

When mixed with all the guests returned to lose. The apparent joy

of Ginny was almost feverish. How many hours were you? Sonya and she would leave with the first trip the next day. He had given a fabulous piece of jewelry, and surely would expect later thanked him by accepting a discreet divorce without much ado.

When dinner was announced, Ginny had stopped caring. It had taken more wine to ease the pain of his heart. Was supporting the arm in the gentleman who was to lead to the dining room when Steven suddenly appeared with the face of fury.

- Have you said goodbye and all?

And before she could answer:

"I've already made my apologies to your father. You'll dine with me.

He squeezed her fingers and wrist, although she tried to resist, as if the secured steel tongs.

Ginny was more than just red. Everyone was looking at!

Practically dragged her along the hall, passing the couples who were to dine with respectable matrons frowned with pursed lips stepmother and discreet waiters impenetrable faces. Thus they came to the carpeted stairs without him turn around to look at it more than once, when she asked if she should take her courtesy suspect up in arms.

On reaching the door of the "suite" tried to escape again.

- Steven! Have you gone mad? What will you think Delia?

"If you want to tell you frankly what I care about what they can think Delia and everyone who is down there ... I do not care! A Delia told him to go to sleep, so it's useless to call her if that's what you were thinking.

He almost fell to enter the room. He heard the bang and the ominous sound of the bolt that came.

The curtains were drawn and the lights of gas available, giving you the feeling of being in a velvet box.

"If you expect to wear that dress again, you better take it off. Take off all those ridiculous that and let you wearing only the necklace.

At the same time furiously tore their own clothes without taking

his eyes off her.

Ginny took a deep breath and faced him defiantly squinting.

"If you want to see me naked, undress me yourself, Steven Morgan. May God condemn me to undress before you like a whore.

- What the hell you think you are if not? I have already had enough patience with you, green-eyed whore! You're the kind of woman who only understands, and deserves treatment.

She advanced to her talking through clenched teeth and, despite the sudden palpitations he felt in his heart, Ginny refused to give ground. A gasp came from his throat when he, thrusting his hands in the neck, pulled down her dress at a stretch. And when he finally threw naked in bed, weak as he complained, holding her by her tangled curls, bent over her.

He felt ... felt like a slave owned by the conqueror. Almost instinctively tried to resist, giving her nails into his back until he, pulling his hair without mercy, drew back, kissing her neck. He remained rigid for a moment but then surrendered with a sigh, he put his arms closer to her, and instead of trying to keep fighting, and stroked her back, arching his hips, legs curled around the thighs firm man.

The Aztec necklace are fastened in the flesh as he was penetrating more and more. The gas flame lights giving the impression that the room grew and shrank around him. His hands and his lips returned to explore and discover their bodies, which were separated and reunited in the tangled sheets.

Below, the guests of Senator had finished dinner and dancing began again in the midst of all gossip.

Ginny fell asleep in the arms that were squeezing. Then he woke again muttering crude words of love on Steven's bare shoulder, feeling aroused in him the desire again.

After that, having rediscovered each other, not let her leave! If you say so, if he announced he had no intention of letting it escape!

- Steven! ... "He muttered.

But he would not let her finish. Kissed her hungrily, possessive, without the feelings stop place for thoughts. It was as if the two refused to consider the expected morning crouched behind the night to separate them.

And separators. Did not I should have guessed it? But how could she assume that the light gray light seeping through the curtains half closed and persistent knocks on the door could erase a night of passion as they had spent?

Another time was in a boat, well sheltered, with hat and coat against the chill of the foggy morning. A pearly light seemed to cover everything, the fog, restless, slipped on the undulating surface.

How sad when the games! Even the tattered shreds of mist seemed disheartened. Ginny was back on board, now a schooner. White candles were being deployed, the shining rails, which then shine the light of the sun, were now covered by water droplets.

Everything seemed to be damp. To Ginny's clothes seemed to hang the body and, to throw some locks of auburn hair rebels back, he noticed that also appeared moist.

The lamps shone in the luxurious cabin that was going to share with Sonya and the room was crowded. The scent of hothouse flowers was almost suffocating. It was as if all the guests at the reception the night before, had decided to come to offer a noisy farewell. In one corner of the booth was a table lying covered with a white cloth, which were arranged silver platters still smoldering and champagne.

"A toast!"

Again and again I heard those words as she stood and emptied their glasses. An elderly man who vaguely remembered seeing Ginny ever, assured him they would have a good trip.

"It's better to travel at this time of year. Will the sun during the whole trip, just leave the port.

As if that mattered! As if he cared anything but the fact that Steven would not have said a word, unless it was to hurry to keep the tide.

The night before ... but maybe it was just a way of saying goodbye. "His" way to pull it altogether.

As he did several times, Ginny's eyes went to the back of the cabin where he was. Clean shaven, dressed as elegantly as any of the other gentlemen who were there did not seem the same naked savage who had owned a few hours before. Still swollen lips hurt by the force of his kisses. "I would suspect everyone who was there what had happened when he had dragged upstairs without a word of explanation? Did it matter? Seeing them now in the cold, gray morning of a spring day, you'd think they were a couple more, so bored of each other as to not affect the separation.

The thick layer of cold dormancy, which protects Ginny thought that was traversed by a wave of anger. That woman who flirted with Steven smiling, bringing his glass to his ... who was he? How dare to flirt with such impudence before their very eyes, without waiting until he was gone?

Suddenly he looked like he had been guessing his thoughts, with their impenetrable and dark blue eyes, veiled by those ridiculously long lashes of which she was mocked many times. With his head thrown back, Ginny stared back.

Steven had already forgotten about the woman standing near him. With joking gesture across his eyes flashing with Ginny's eyes, raised his glass in his direction. What now seemed cold and angry, her hair gathered discreetly under your hat, long sleeved dress that hung around his neck a leaden gray that made it seem Quaker until ... until you bumped into that mouth and those eyes! Your little witch with green eyes! ... I remembered too well the frantic beating of his heart against his chest, like those of a woodland creature that had been captured. And the whispers incoherent that he escaped parted lips. Ginny, Nemesis and siren ... The kind of woman who could draw any man to his own destruction. He was capable of fighting and insulting one moment, and surrender completely abandoned the next. How he managed to escape while he forced her to give her body! If stormy in recent months she had

given any sign that even he had changed his mind about this ridiculous trip to Europe ... Steven bitterly acknowledged that, if only for pride, he had insisted on to make the happy journey. I wanted to give the opportunity to find their own destiny, he wanted to leave complete freedom to make their own choice so that when the do, not theirs. It was better that way, not only for herself but for her own mental health. Too often lately had been about to let his jealousy did jump controls unconscionable that he himself had imposed.

Steven's eyes studied her with a caressing look, almost of appreciation. Suddenly, as if he could bear, Ginny turned and slipped out of the cabin, letting in a gust of fresh air and moist before the door closed behind her.

"Sorry," he said mechanically to the pretty brunette whose expression was disappointed guessed almost whining.

He emptied the glass of a drink in her hand and served two more, giving a tip to the obsequious waiter who tended the bar. After no time to argue, against their best intentions, went after her.

She was leaning on the railing of the deck and handed him the cup without a word. Sullenly, the green eyes of the girl crossed with hers and then bowed his head and drank every last drop of champagne like water, in one gulp, pulling the cup over the side, almost in a same movement.

"Farewell, baby," he whispered over the top, following the game. She pulled away, fixing his gloved hands on the sleek railing so hard that she thought she was going to break his fingers. The breeze that rippled the surface reduced to shreds and remnants of the mist, drew the curves of her slender body. Steven could feel her skirt clung to her legs. I was about to speak, to say a sentence inconsequential, when she, still on his back, said his name aloud.
-Steven ...

Now, almost suddenly, as if all doubts and misunderstandings that had separated in recent months had gone in a minute, he realized the tremendous struggle that was arguing with herself. He guessed

that the tug of war between pride and feelings made her stay back, overlooking the ocean, not daring to look into the eyes of the answers he expected. The same damn sentimental hesitation that he had tried to refuse. Only Ginny had more courage. Without trying to help her, without answering his call, saw Ginny straightened his shoulders and lifted his chin defiantly.

- Do you know? There is something I want to ask. Steven will you ... want it back?

He hesitated too looking for the precise answer. After cautiously said:

"Ginny, I want you to do exactly what you want to do.

Just said it was cursed for being so cowardly. How stupid and considered his words had sounded cautious! She, at least, was braver than he. Which was damn stubborn and desirable!

Ginny turned around to face him face to face, not caring that he saw the shining tears that filled her eyes.

"Then," he said firmly, holding her gaze, then I should have put the question differently. Perhaps they will get to answer without the possibility of misunderstandings. You ... me? She bit her lip and said controlled voice, "What do you feel about me, Steven? Do you care about something? How far can I reach you care? Do not you realize you need to know?

Caught by surprise, quietly and with a jerk, Steven said:

- I'm crazy about you, girl! Did not you always known?

For a moment, seeing the sparkle in his green eyes, he thought he was going to slap. I knew I deserved.

At that moment a powerful metal voice and separated them.

- Visits to earth! Visits to earth! Last call!

Whatever be the criticism that she was about to do, were drowned by the peremptory call.

Her solemn eyes wide open, searched through him the answer he was claiming.

How many things were left unsaid! Words of love, hope and even jealousy! In the infant and expectant look of it, faded from the lips

of Steven's grin. Angry, impatient, frustrated ... yes, it was truly unfortunate.

She put her hands on her shoulders and said huskily:

"Ginny ...

She shook her head.

- No, no! Say no more, Steven. I do not want to say anything else ... If you can not tell me with words, show me. Steven, tell me so ...

Suddenly, violently, not caring that the deck was crowded, Ginny threw herself into his arms, standing on tiptoe to surround the neck with his and, with parted lips, her mouth eagerly sought.

And he could not resist. Pressed in his arms as if to break it and his mouth kissed her passionately as wild, which made her moan softly in spite of the pleasure it gave him savor his triumph. I could say anything he wanted, he could kiss her as if she hated him for having surprised ... But he wanted ... he wanted!

All his instincts, so long asleep, seemed to tell at this time.

He kissed her like that night in Veracruz where for the first time, had told her he loved her. When told that she had bewitched and had possessed her eagerly as she spoke words of love in Spanish, caressing her burning skin.

The fury of passion became felt tenderness when delivered gently molding her body to his, while he enjoyed the saltiness of her tears. The magic of the moment was marred by embarrassing cough and father's voice sounded behind them, reminding them that the boats were sharply starting.

"They are delaying the final shipment for us. I think what ...

Ginny's face was pale and covered with tears. His dark green eyes watched him.

With an effort he slipped his arms from behind, sticking their fingers in their shoulders to separate.

Quietly, clasping her eyebrows in frustration, said in Spanish:

- Perdition takes you, green-eyed witch! Did you find the answer?

What more do you want from me? Does my hair to colgártela trophy in his belt?

Before I could answer or even realizing what he had said with clenched jaws, hands away from him and his eyes looked impenetrable recovered.

This time the kiss was politely formal, just a touch on the Libyans.

"Take care, my dear.

Ginny stood there, leaning on the railing to steady himself, as if rooted there and not move out of that place anymore. And saw him leave without turning around even once.

Do you always be so? Ginny was slowly returning to reality and after a nightmare that fades away. In his mind an image was recorded: Steven, separating from her. How many times had he done that and how many others would?

"You're getting morbid Ginny muttered to herself. Do not live in the past, at least not in that part of the past. "

He stood up, took a deep breath and walked away from the window trying to going to sleep. I did not want to be awake like a typical jealous wife when Steven returned. This time things would be different. Very different.

Chapter 3

Despite their good intentions, the day after Ginny was like a beast. Naturally it was Steven who was furious, daring metérsele in bed when the sun was well up. He appeared quietly out of the closet, her hair still wet and bloodshot eyes.

He had just returned home! How dare he! Ginny had thought about doing the sleeping, but his heavy breathing betrayed her and saw that Steven got up a little lip with a mocking smile. He jumped with his green eyes flashing.

"We arrived quite early, is not it, Steven?

"To tell the truth, I am surprised to find you awake at this hour so absurd, darling. Angry, you're even more adorable. Do you mind a little cum? I have not slept much.

- Oh, you're a ...! The anger took his breath away. She wanted to scratch until he lost that damn sneer.

He climbed into bed beside her, pushing her away wearily and almost insolent, grabbing his wrists to make her scream again, this time of sorrow.

- Enough! You're hurting when you're the one that you deserve ... Oh, I would ask you what you deserve! You think I'm the typical innocent wife is going to swallow that you spent the night in the locker room? What have you been playing cards or any other pretext classic masculine? I will not entertain in ...

"Darling, if you do not stop screaming like a witch, you will oblige me to show you I'm not going to entertain in ... You'll see how calm tantrums when you come to try to get some sleep! I mean you, Ginny. You better stop fighting or you will encourage me to use violence!

She caught what he half-closed eyes, were fixed on his body suddenly wavy. He gasped with righteous anger.

- Oh, no! If you think I'll let you use me after spending the night with God knows who! ... Better ... you'd better get back to sleep in separate rooms as we did before.

Steven's mouth tightened and a nasty tone that too well, "Ginny reminded him to change his voice.

"There are some things, madam, you have to entrarte in that pretty head of yours. One is that I am entitled to enjoy your body, how well you offer, when and how I please myself. Yes, although it has been with ... what you said before? God knows what you said!

What was determined to resist? Steven slid over his body with the same vicious gesture that stretched his arms, held her wrists above her head.

And his "Steven, no!" Came too late, when he told her with cruel sweetness pressing her face against her:

"And next time, dear, have the delicacy of asking me where I was, before reaching your own conclusions. Were not you, perhaps, that a few weeks ago talked about trust?

Now they were both panting with rage him, pretending it loose.

The dark blue eyes and flashing him her green eyes were staring

each other in a new confrontation. Ginny showed his teeth like a cornered fox, daring to attempt to kiss her.

- Gross! Do I always have to use your strength to me?

- Do I always have you to provoke me?

- Damn you! I will not allow rape me!

"If you'd put a furious fight like a cat, we would get that. "After measuring his words, he continued mockingly: Unless this is the way you like you have left you ... In which case, treasure, he would have have told me that and I would have liked always happy.

Ginny pursed her lips at him. I was kidding and he was not going to let! I would face any game he wanted to play.

He suddenly felt completely inert. With a sigh, closed his eyes in resignation and said wearily:

- Okay! You should know enough by now that you are physically much stronger than me, so what does it matter? Do what you want with me, Steven, but please try to finish soon, okay? I'm hungry, I eat breakfast and you say you need sleep.

He heard how he took air and an enormous effort of will, kept his eyes closed. The truth is that he dared not look at it because he felt anguished that he had gone too far.

- Is this how you keep your lovers submissive?

Under the deceptive sweetness of the voice of Steven, had a vibration that she had not heard lately. A tone of disgust and fury deaf almost made her tremble. In the same tone followed with familiarity:

"You sound like a prostitute you know? The truth is that it should not forget that this is precisely what you are ... You did well recently in your career?

Her lips stiffened but, since they had come so, Ginny made an effort and replied blankly:

"Not as well as you do in yours, for whatever you're spending now. You know as well to the prostitutes, dear Steven! After all you who has trained me, right?

Somewhere in his mind, a voice, hers, she said desperately, "Why

are we saying these horrible things? How did this start? "

Steven, looking down the face that no more than expressing alienation felt impulses to strangle her. Ramerita vicious tongue! How dare to excite, to provoke and stay after lying as a martyr, hoping to make her pieces? And he believed he already had dominated!

"Looks like I have not yet trained enough ... Perdition take you! But I will try to remedy it!

The brief, sudden laugh escaped his lips when released, made Ginny's eyes open wide. She was waiting ... No, I did not know exactly what I expected. Certainly not what came later when he took to pulling up the closet where he kept his clothes.

What had happened now? Could she ever understand that wild and unpredictable lover had become her husband? When he wanted, Steven could represent the role wonderfully perfect gentleman, smart and sophisticated, but she must always remember that underneath that smooth appearance, there lurked a savage. He could not help, Ginny felt a chill of fear. What was stirring his clothes?

He tried to speak with the voice calm as possible.

"If you do not mind, I prefer to prepare the girl clothes.

Ginny practically recoiled when he pulled one of her favorite dresses, silk brocade from which hung padded hanger and, narrowing his eyes with a look particularly evil, he turned to her.

"Yes, I do. Get dressed, Ginny. And fast.

She gave a hysterical laugh. Could it be that he wanted to get dressed instead of undress for him? Had he gone mad? At that time he pulled up her dress and her incipient attack of nerves gave way to anger.

- I will not wear, Steven Morgan! I will not leave you neither send nor any other man!

Instead of reacting, he was merely present with a sarcastic nod.

"Madam, you have five minutes. Until I get dressed again. After this time ... well, you reminded me a few minutes ago I'm stronger

than you, is not it? "And then, hardening his voice:" Do not try my patience. Because you are naked or dressed for a walk with me. I decided to satisfy your curiosity about where I was last night. He recalled another unintentional walk with him, long ago, half naked and with his rifle across his chest. He remembered the sensation of feeling that he tore his clothes, the heat of his blood on the bare skin and the chicken-flapping against the warm blue sky and half ... half way with him crawling through the mud mucky swamp with trees that no let them see the light, as if in a cage surrounded by green miasma. There were so many things that were part of the eternal contention between them! Obstinate contest of wills ... and before you jump on their heels leaving her, Ginny could have sworn that these thoughts were passing through his head.

He was dressed and waiting when he clean-shaven and dressed. Puckered her black eyebrows when setting eyes on her insolently. What was the damned unpredictable little witch! The best had expected some resistance, at worst, he pulled something to mind when planted with legs apart had forced him to impose his will. Instead, there he was, facing him, fully dressed, perfectly calm and apparently fascinated with the program.

Despite his scowl could not help but applaud at the bottom of his soul. Ginny's smile was artificial.

- You like? You've never seen since this dress. It was wildly expensive but I could not resist buying it. Is that why you asked me to put it?

The brocade polonaise fell in graceful folds over a petticoat of green a little darker than the bouquets that adorn the pearly silk that covered the panniers and ended with a small tail. The bodice had a very low neckline that suited her perfectly. It was an evening dress, inappropriate for use in the morning. That was one of the reasons why he chose precisely that dress: for pure evil.

"You better bring a shawl to cover your shoulders," he said pretending to ignore the subtlety of his challenge.

"But thank you very much, Steven. How considerate! Will it be a long ride? Why would you leave a message for Sonya ...

"I've seen to that. The tone of his voice warned him not to exaggerate their performance and Ginny thought with pleasure that unhealthy for years had not seen him so angry.

An hour later, when Ginny was very hot and felt really choked, his face covered with beads of sweat under the veil that he had forced to wear, "she fell to her turn to be angry. Not even realizing that they were entering the city of New Orleans could stem the tide of anger I felt growing in his chest. And ... yes, must admit I was feeling apprehensive. With Steven never knew.

Ginny glanced at him below the eyelashes, but her expression was imperturbable. He had hardly uttered a word, even when she tried to touch her skin with his chin. A sullen silence was the only recourse. But when they arrived at their destination, he found that his false obedience was no more than pure simulation. "I will not be intimidated," he said Ginny. Steven will have to admit it.

"Strange as it seems, Steven, without even looking, he had become acutely aware of what he was thinking. She was extremely stubborn, as he well knew! Could he did not have to bow to, but never break. And did he break it wanted? By then he had spent the rage and began to feel a little silly for having been dragged into this crazy adventure. I should have gone ahead and having possessed, as he had said, I would like it or not. Despite the hateful words and often say that cutting their bodies spoke the same language. Yes, it should have been present and, instead of being in New Orleans now, feeling awfully tired and irritated, I would be peacefully asleep at that time.

The little carriage that Steven had insisted on guiding himself, he turned down a wide avenue shaded by trees, lined with imposing houses of stone and brick, almost all of at least three stories high. Street of the basin, read Ginny wrinkling his nose. What such strange names chose the people of New Orleans! Steven Would we plan to visit an old friend, whose existence had preferred to keep

secret until then? No, that would be too easy a solution. Without realizing it, Ginny tilted her chin defiantly. It would give him the pleasure of asking, or even shown interest in his alibi. We would see who really did not care where he had been the night before. What he really objected to was this long and tedious journey home from the relatively fresh from the plantation to the humid atmosphere of the city. It was sticky with sweat and thirsty. Steven was typical of the account did not have breakfast before leaving it with his usual drag arbitrary!

At that time the car jerked to a halt, interrupting the thoughts of Ginny. A bold, gold buttons proudly wearing his red jacket, rushed to pick up the reins he threw carelessly Steven. He beamed with a look of joy that revealed his white teeth when Steven handed him a coin he received in his free hand.

- Thank you, sir! I assure you, take good care of the horses, sir. Through such long eyelashes as Steven, the watery dark eyes watched the boy curiously at the lady who gave Steven his hand to help her down the car.

This lady does not look anything like all the other ladies who came during the day. First, never seen a pretty dress like that and, second, glancing through the veil that covered, you could guess it was a beautiful woman.

Steven also looked askance, while giving a strong pull at the bell of golden wrought iron gate, which prevented the entrance to the narrow passage leading into the street. The call attracted an older man, also dressed in uniform. Behind the door, Ginny could see the top floors of a house a bit away from the street, whose white shutters were closed to keep out the sun's heat. The passage of stone and brick was vaulted and was pleasantly cool in contrast to the heat of the street. Small torches burning in exquisite wrought iron chandeliers, reminded Mexico. This impression is deepened after listening to the gentle tinkling and splashing water. A source! Two twin marble cherubs, jars held inclined paths leaving an endless stream of running water in the circular pool was below.

The servant who opened, drove to the house by the stunning mahogany and bronze door of the front of the mansion. His obsequious smile showed that he knew what to expect. Steven seemed to know by way of greeting. Ginny was about to prance with rage. Why had deserted him in his bed last night? Why was he so ... so dominant that had made him lose his temper, preventing things now ask to be dying to know?

A pretty mulatto girl received the lace shawl and Ginny too, thank God, "his hat. Now, free from the veil happy, I could see what was about much more clearly.

- Would you like some refreshments first, sir? Or if you prefer there is a room vacant. I'll tell the lady that you are here. I do not think he expected it so early.

Everything that was in the lobby was cozy and tasteful. A shelf for hats, a few mirrors in gilt frames that enlarged the room and a truly exquisite crystal chandelier. Who would be "Mrs."?, Ginny asked angrily. Could Steven sought to present his latest mistress? She slipped her arm tightly with which he held with excessive gentleness, and was about to open his mouth to tell her that she was not willing to put up more mysteries when she heard a door open and a rather deep voice, languid woman saying:

"Oh, okay, Belle. As you can see I'm awake. You can return to what he was doing ... Steven? Well, she was right, did not expect him back soon! Have not slept at all, then?

Tall, blonde and slender, the woman came forward with both hands outstretched. He wore expensive perfume, Ginny reluctantly acknowledged, and the dress was too expensive. And it was undeniably attractive. How dare Steven? Which is what was up? Soon I would know. With growing amazement, Ginny saw Steven gave women both hands and kissed her lightly before having the effrontery to say:

"Hello, Hortense. Are you the kind of woman who always manages to be beautiful at any time of day! No, the truth is I have not had time to take a nap yet. "Ginny caught his eye sideways and dug her

nails into her fists. So I decided to come back together. Do you have a room?

Hortense, measuring Ginny with her eyes and making it immediately to the side, laughed politely as if he had said something very funny.

- Everything you want, cher ami! It's all yours! Do you want the room white and gold, which is full of mirrors?

Chapter 4

At first Ginny felt torn between wanting to give way to a fit of hysterical laughter and screaming with rage. Even Steven, things were going too far. Nevertheless, it was now his wife. How dare he bring her to a place like this? She was not the submissive girl had kept captive in the house of Madame Lila in El Paso, like a whore. When that memory haunted his memory, he still ran his spine a shiver of fear. Could you ever forget? Could you forget him?

They faced each other in the room that, contrary to what was likely was lit and airy, with barred windows looking onto the garden. A room furnished in French Provencal style, elegant and charming, until you noticed that there were mirrors everywhere, skillfully arranged to pick from all angles, the huge bed. The two-swordsmen-experts were on their guard not seem so.

So far, except a small attempt to protest, Ginny, with compressed lips, had endeavored to remain silent. Below, the vehemence of his "Steven!" Had been silenced by a not too gentle grip on her wrist and a look almost expectantly. He felt he had foreseen that she would create a scandal and that, too, was ready. No doubt there would have dominated and taken upstairs like it or not. No, would not come to such degradation!

Hortense had looked with a faint smile of courtesy.

- Oh, you should not feel embarrassed! Here we are very discreet, as I have said Steven. You will not at the hands of any other while I'm here, I promise!

Then he turned to Steven briskly

- Would you like some breakfast? With a little champagne? I make him go up in minutes so you do not have to wait.

True to his word, a maid knocked on the door almost at their heels, carrying two bottles of champagne from an excellent vintage in a silver bucket.

Then, after taking a look impenetrable, Steven said politely:

-You will take a bit of champagne, right?

And he began to serve the drinks without waiting for an answer.

Ginny breathed a breath of air while trying to maintain his composure. When they began to play, even if the cat and mouse, Ginny was able to show that was such a good player like him. He took the glass he handed him, meeting his eyes unreadable, assuming an air of careless indifference as he played with the rim of his glass to his.

- How touching your hand to take you all this work just to be sure I'm going to believe your explanations about the absence of last night! Or you brought me here for breakfast? If so, what a nice surprise!

When narrowed to face her, his eyes darkened slightly, but he rewarded her with a mocking smile of appreciation.

"Touche, darling," she said softly, "I see you've learned to fight back with fine sarcasm, rather than sharp claws. You should show this aspect of your personality more often ... I could improve relations between us.

She gave him a false laugh, just a grin curling his lips upwards.

- How good you know something I like! Should I add "my lord and master", as do the women of Eastern countries? And as for that ... the relationship between us, what about it, Steven? Let me try again my role. Is a submissive and devoted wife? Does the mother? Does the slave? Is a dear understanding and undemanding, perhaps?

Only by the tension of the muscles of the face and the sudden rigidity of the mouth, Ginny was aware that he was furious. She looked up at the empty glass before and immediately refilled his

glass of champagne.

He had not yet because there was no trust. Infuriated him that she did not give ground and, worse, lose his temper not giving him the pretext he needed to tear off her clothes and take her as so often had done. The devil's patience had been exercising for months since they married formally in San Francisco! I had left and gone to Europe, had sought all his former lovers, also add new ones to the list. And he had the audacity to give birth to twins, without having the courtesy to tell who had fathered ... If it really was the father! Damn! He had no right to be so unpredictable, so unusual. Deserved to be put in place or ... how she'd said sarcastically? Tell him what was his role.

Steven thrust a dangerous look, almost decided to do exactly what they demanded their wishes without wasting on finding an excuse. Her sparkling green eyes stared at him defiantly, as if they were really urging him ... And maybe that was what he was doing the little vixen!

The arrival of breakfast saved: oysters on the half shell, crispy bread was still warm, which seemed freshly whipped butter and a jar of honey. The aroma of coffee was delicious.

- How homey all! "Purred Ginny sitting and starting to use without looking at him.

Nevertheless, she had the feeling that he was still willing to let her out for breakfast.

- Did you give this princely treatment each time you visit this ... here, Steven? Oh, sit down and join me, I get nervous paseándote like a caged beast!

He felt relieved that he sat in the chair opposite her, his long brown fingers playing with the edge of the glass while looking at her with eyes half-closed. For several minutes no one spoke. What was I thinking? What was she planning to do then? Ginny felt it was the scapegoat of a predator. The was lurking, that was! I was hoping when I caught her off guard. Well, she would attack first.

- Do you have the habit of visiting these places, Steven? I've

always wondered why men are quite attractive to females, need to buy the favors of prostitutes. Hum! ... These oysters are great! Is it true that they are considered ...?

- Ginny! Her voice cut with sharp tone. Yes, your two questions. As for prostitutes, because not a man, is something that in any case you will understand. And as for this ... this particular house, it happens that I own. I won playing poker last night when our mutual friend, who usually earns Bishop threw four aces, allowing me to win that hand.

Ginny jumped in his seat, breaking almost to tears.

- "Mr. Bishop? You mean he's in New Orleans? Do you have any excuse for failing to offer again soon? But how! If Renaldo and Missie had not confused the soldiers and the sheriff, the two might be dead.

"If that had happened, I am sure that Mr. Bishop had been overwhelmed, but resigned. Jim is an essentially practical man. With her long legs crossed, Steven leaned back in his chair, feeling wicked fun with the sudden numbness of it to hear the first part of his surprise speech.

- Did you say you won the house? Did you win this ... this brothel playing cards? And why the hell were you playing cards? What are you doing here Mr. Bishop? You know very well that it is here is to ask you something. What are you going to ask now? Steve, you refused, right?

Observing him was the feeling that he shut himself up in himself, leaving her outside. With studied indifference he shrugged.

"Even Jim Bishop takes a vacation from time to time. And you, Ginny, my love, you have the habit of always being your own conclusions. As you did this morning, if I remember.

- Do not try to distract myself with deceptions, Steven!

She leaned toward him, trying to attract his attention peremptorily suddenly absorbed by the breakfast.

"Mr. Bishop never goes anywhere without a specific reason. That you know it as well as myself.

He raised an eyebrow towards her and drawled, said:

"My dear, you must tell me how you got to know so well for Jim. You said you had done a trip to Mexico to see you, no?

- Oh, Steven, you are unbearable!

- Unfortunately seem intolerable, lady!

I hated to tell her "lady" with the mocking tone dragged! Stiffened with rage and jealousy when he said afterwards:

"Perhaps you prefer to return to Mexico without the burden of my company. Surely not when you see your children again and I have business here that will take me some time.

- How to operate a brothel? From what I've said many times that I could tell you the most useful. Is that why you brought me here?

"I brought you because you are a charlatan who must be tamed.

In a boot up from the chair and lifting of his body pressed against his.

"And because it is the law of unwritten law that the owner try a sample before placing the goods on sale. In fact I may decide to leave you here. It may be a good way of not letting you astray ... and back to bed whenever I can think of.

His words, deliberately calculated and brutal, had the effect he was looking for her out of their boxes.

- You ... you ... bastard! No, never ... never get get me ...!

- No? Do not tease me, Ginny!

Suddenly, as I used to before he took off like shouting insults, with the brutal force of a kiss that made her pull back, to believe that his neck would break. He began to feel that she turned her head, her thoughts became tangled and incoherent. It was not fair, just was not fair! Needed to be possessed! I had the devil inside insatiable desire and Steven was the devil that kept him from thinking and left him only able to feel and desire. The passion grew as Steven's body was molded to his, by beating promising hardness against her thigh. Oh, God! Would she ever be herself? Steven, who had hurt so many times and would continue ...

Without knowing why, without knowing how, found himself

returning hugging and kissing him on his toes. It was his and he wanted! Have not had told him it was his obsession? We wanted another one as well, and although they destroyed each other and will fight unceasingly, the desire that held them together was indestructible.

They fell together on the bed, joining without warning, without losing time to undress completely. Was it hatred, it was love? In any case, was certainly a passion, and feelings were no doubt meant it as well.

At the same time Sonya was only disappointment. William was not customary to leave the house without considering where he was going to say. And as for Ginny and the happy husband of hers, had not yet returned.

Sonya Ginny thought more should be respected herself, and not go riding with Steven after he had made the affront to spend all night outside. Even the servants were gossiping and Ginny's maid Tillie had told the couple was fighting loudly when she went to wake his wife.

Men have no scruples! Sonya blushed to remember what Steven had few scruples in dealing with it. And above it could remember! ... Sonya found her china-blue eyes in the mirror, we automatically collect a strand of hair out of place. The new hat really suited her wonderfully. Tilted slightly forward to shade his eyes made her ... well, it made her younger. Of course, not that it was still old. All his friends had told him they had hardly changed. And ... this young, charming, who had been courting, telling extravagant compliments even after she reminded him that she was married ... what was his name? Ah, yes, Andre Delery.

Sonya, who was essentially pragmatic, mentally shrugged his shoulders. Surely Andre had been attentive to her to get himself presented to Ginny. The truth is that you had recalled Steven Morgan, somehow the two were alike. Maybe not by their physical

appearance, but by his manner. He had felt the charm of Mr. Delery was something dangerous, perhaps because he had noticed the respect with which they treated other people, despite his youth. - Will need u'té to cubie'ta chaise, ma'am? Do you want to accompany?

Tillie was, as always going quietly. Sonya often wondered if Tillie did not know much and what it was that thought in the back, but then, it erased the idea of the head. Who cared? Tillie was at least loyal and that's what mattered.

"Oh yes, I go in the buggy because the road to La Terre Promise is so short ...

Sonya was a little distracted, still thinking about the absence of her husband.

"Charles can take the buggy and brought back. Mrs. Pruett will deal with security on my return. And you can iron my blue taffeta dress. Tonight we are going to dinner at Antoine's with some friends.

Sonya had thought it best not to take Tillie because Adeline Pruett had insisted that they should have a long intimate talk.

"Only two of us, dear. How much things, entertain us! Besides, I'm dying of curiosity to know the latest gossip. This is so boring compared to the circles where you move you now! Although "He lowered his voice conspiratorially tone not failed us entertainment during the war years right?

All this reminded him unpleasantly Adeline Sonya Pruett, who was then a sophisticated older woman whose husband was waging war, had been his closest confidant during those days that was determined to forget. Coming down the stairs followed by Tillie who carried her parasol, she thought Sonya resolution now know beyond doubt how far the dearest memories of Adeline.

- Sonya, dear! How nice of you for coming! He feared that this dreadful heat dare not go. Bernard, ring the bell, please, will you? Let's see: sure you've met Bernard's friends ... Lucian Delery Valette ... Andre ...

Mrs. Pruett, always so self-possessed, looked a bit uncomfortable. But Sonya, still affected by the sweltering heat of the street, did not notice the change in ways of her friend. Bernard Pruett, a vacuous-looking young man much like his father, had ordered to bring refreshments and Sonya punctiliously led to a chair. Sonya smiled kindly despite feeling a little guilty as if waiting for a ruling. He was not in the mood today to continue the talk of Adeline as usual, especially considering that Adeline could have recognized Steven despite the whiskers that had grown. Sonya realized that as he was drinking chilled white wine, was becoming more lively. It was so unusual that the dreaded Adeline Pruett was bewildered! But, apparently, Bernard had brought his two closest pals to support him before his mother when he announced that the night before had been engaged to Miss Althea Pennington. Sonya personally saw no objections to the marriage. Ms. Pennington was a renowned beauty and the millions of his father were at the height of Pruett. Of course, belonged to one of the old Creole families, but what did it matter that at this stage of life? Bernard was an adult and could dispose of his fortune. It was time, as evidenced by the skirts of his mother! Sonya's mood became more sparkling and a flush-that suited her very well begin to color the porcelain skin. After all, "thought Sonya shook her head mentally, Adeline, despite her tenacious personality, he had to learn that not everything would always go to the extent of his desires. And was not very pleasing to note that she, Sonya, was still young and attractive while Adeline had gone stale becoming a midwife for the past ten years?

- Do you know? I was devastated when I knew he was married. And I told Lucian: "There can be, is too young ... "Do not take it as flattery on my part but as a vote of sincere admiration, if I dare say that last night at the Opera ball, you were by far the prettiest of all the ladies present.

Andre Delery was undoubtedly a skilled lover. How could men learn as quickly these days? His compliments were rather bold, thought Sonya. It was nice to feel for once the spotlight instead of always doing as second fiddle beside Ginny. And there was nothing wrong with a little flirting again, was not it? It was a game accepted by everyone here in the South, without being given greater importance, of course. Even the well accepted it Adeline. Mrs. Pruett, who was not a fool, guess what Sonya was thinking. And he was too upset with his son, who so artfully had broken that morning with the news of her engagement with the spoiled rich daughter of a new Yankee to pay attention to what was happening around him. How Bernard happened to bring their friends to protect him from his own mother? He knew that his way always logical to address the problems, it would have prevented a step so hasty, and therefore, had decided to put before a fait accompli, for the holy name of God! Why Bernard had gone so like her father? For further insult, her son with an assurance that she could not believe he decided to leave while his friends were also excused under the pretext of accompanying Mrs. Brandon home before it was too late.

- Oh, Adeline Sonya in mock-lamented sadly, I had expected a long and pleasant talk with you! I hope that we arrange another meeting soon. Maybe you can come visit you!

The return to the plantation was much nicer in the relatively cool evening. It was also nice to get back escorted by three young men and attractive. Sonya again felt a young girl, especially when the other two boys stayed behind a bit and Andre-he had asked me to call him well-rode by his side, looking for her with a deep look that betrayed the light tone of his conversation . It felt very flattered that he had chosen to make confidences, telling the story of her past life and telling him, believe it or not, was greater than it seemed. He said it was a pleasure talking with a woman being able

to mature enough to understand.

- It's so easy to talk with you! Frankly, you're the first woman I've

...

It was cut off as if he had said too much and Sonya blushed with pleasure at the compliment implied. Really, what more honest man hiding behind the polite young man and knew that other worldly! If she was Ginny, at this time ... Sonya felt a twinge of despair at the memory of his stepdaughter that from the beginning, had proved a hindrance in your life. Ginny had no doubt been keeping three men in suspense, awaiting her as she flirted shamelessly with all three at once. Of course then would be difficult for them to continue holding.

It certainly was not easy to imagine that a man like Andre Delery, admits to enjoying the conversation with a woman so shameless. It is possible that he could-and Sonya blushed at the thought "do more than flirt with Ginny. Despite the respect with which Andre addressed her, Sonya had the impression it was a Don Juan.

That's what little questioning confirmed with Mrs. Pruett Sonya, when that evening they met again in the box at the opera. That was later thought Sonya-a disastrous night. He should have pretended to have a good headache and stayed in bed. And it would have done if William had not been so unreasonable. First her husband, who usually was the most caring and civilized men, and now Mrs. Pruett-he could barely talk, had endeavored to warn him not to be shown in the company of Andre Delery, according to Sonya began to believe , was the object of malevolence and general misunderstanding.

"Naturally, Adeline is jealous because she's old ... But why has stopped gaining weight and has taken the appearance of a midwife? But William has no excuse for behaving as if he did not trust me, after the years I've been married without ever gave you the slightest cause for complaint. It was more of what you might call, an unexpected thought Sonya attempt of rebellion. No, it was not fair, especially given how lightly excused all the extravagances

of Ginny.

Chapter 5

Sonya could not know that Ginny was far from happy that night, but did not admit or show it. Ginny was furious and anger always gave new luster to his manner and his look, as Steven had told him many times, preferring to ignore it-that-that, in general, he was the cause of annoyance. And this time he had gone too far. No matter how strange could be affected their relationship, Ginny had vowed in silence, once and forever, your wife would show her pride was not going to re-submit with their contemptuous treatment.

Ginny walked from one end to another of the fourth gold and white like a caged lion, with his shock of red hair hitting her waist. Mirrors restored his image, first with a frown and then laughing, as he was rehearsing the role he thought represented that night. His eyes narrowed, planning what he intended to do. Oh yes, Steven would be surprised. Was mistaken if he thought it would be full as easy to intimidate it now, as in that other time, when she had her captive in the brothel of Madame Lila in El Paso. He had learned a lot since then and Steven would be taken into account.

Some slight noise had started to seep through the floors carpeted room under the house was awakening. The faint tinkle of a piano, the laughter of a woman, the rumble of the bass voice of a man. He felt a slight smell of incense added exoticism and exotic enough to the stage. One scenario prepared for the exercise of seduction and engage in rituals of a "love" bought. Would naturally like this one other rooms, all decorated differently, but all designed with the same purpose. In this exclusive apartment, the rooms were rented during the day to couples who wanted to have a discreet and private site: married women with their lovers, respectable gentlemen with their mistresses. The day brothel became an elegant brothel by night, only affordable to a group of elected and very rich men, where only serving wine and champagne. Meals were prepared by a French cook and the ladies held "conferences"

with their clients by appointment only!

Ginny was aware of this when he sat before the dressing table full of mirrors and pulled the top drawer. Steven, a man who was thought not to investigate but had reviewed her drawers and two cupboards twin room when, on waking, he had met both her husband and her dress had disappeared. Obviously the regular occupants of the fourth gold and white, grooming delighted. Not only had men's and women's clothes from different eras and styles but also an inexhaustible treasure of cosmetics and perfumes. Her eyes shining with excitement and malice, Ginny was studied carefully before choosing a bottle of lipstick and apply it while letting your imagination. The trick he had used in El Paso, it would be useful again. Only this time he would not be caught.

"Gentlemen ...

The man's voice sounded ragged, however, had an accent of authority that all the heads of the smoking room they turned toward the door. Henry Warmoth, governor of Louisiana, stepped forward and, bowing ceremoniously to the young woman in the hand, said:

- I present to Helen of Troy!

The newcomer posed for them with a grace and poise that was almost arrogance, well aware of that looked like a vision, enjoying varying degrees of amazement that were painted on the faces turned toward her.

He wore a white gown, gathered in artistic folds that left one shoulder bare and peach naked shapely leg to the thigh. A thin gold cord, crossed under the breast, highlighting their delicious curves. If you looked closely, through the almost transparent material, it was possible to see that her nipples had been painted with a touch of rouge, and if the eyes followed up her eyes would be trapped by a red mouth, inviting the kiss and emerald eyes narrowed slightly, while mocking and challenging. Her hair, which

shone like burnished copper just under the lighted candles, dimmed the gold ribbons with which it had been twisted. If this hair had now collected tapes were released, how far would arrive and what cover?

Satisfied with the effect he had caused, Warmoth Henry smiled.

- Are not I a lucky man? It occurred a little incident: my lovely goddess had been accidentally locked in his room, a chandelier fell ... a small setback that could have been worse if I had not been there at that time. And, meet a real Aphrodite, how I was going to deny your request to escort meet until she found the lucky that will accompany tonight? He looked around quizzically adding more softly with evident sincerity: "It goes without saying that would give anything to change the place to whoever is the lucky ...

Fun by the crushing silence, Ginny spent the view of one side to another and said in a soft voice:

- Senator Brandon, how nice! "And ignoring his gesture of displeasure," And Paco Davis! I swear lately I have been very neglected, I am sure you will forgive him. How is our baby? His eyes, after watching Paco choke on the drink, landing on another familiar face, encountering gray eyes that had had time environments.

"Jim, my dear ... How could you keep me waiting so long? I did exactly what you asked me ... and you said you had no time to wait and see how the dress I sat ... Oh, I hope not having upset too! I mean ... I'm sure these gentlemen understand.

The governor cleared his throat and threw her shoulders back to make it clear that if the gentlemen wanted to continue playing cards, he would be more than happy willing to do the divine Aphrodite ... At that time she touched his cheek with a kiss provocative, whispering while they are happy to serve you the next night if she arranged with Hortense.

Things were at that point when Mr. Bishop, with a resigned sigh, got up determined to take charge of the situation that was going too far.

"Gentlemen, excuse me, please. Y. .. this ... Aphrodite, let me apologize up. I had not realized that the wait was doing. Their laughter and clinking found: his, barely sketched and menacing, the broad and winning it. He had taken his hand, very reluctantly abandoned by the governor, when Steven Morgan returned to his game, ice cream at the incredible spectacle that was taking his wife, whom he felt enclosed and safe in the upstairs room, dressed now with a Greek tunic so transparent that showed almost everything that was on offer. Above had the nerve to smile sweetly as she leaned languidly on the shoulder of Bishop.

- Hello, Steven! You're having fun? I do.

It was at that moment when he almost lost his head. Ginny could not avoid a slight tremor at the flash of murderous rage in the dark blue eyes looked askance at the threatening. A discreet cough warning Bishop, tempers calmed. Steven's face turned to stone and only a slight trembling of the jaws showed the barely contained fury. I wanted to strangle her and she knew it. Oh yes, be long before Steven again feel ownership of it!

Ginny caught with the arm strength that Jim Bishop politely escorted upstairs, ignoring the horrible look and ominously polite nod that Steven had dedicated.

- Lady, still do not know what to do with you! His behavior tonight

...

Mr. Bishop was visibly upset and had lost control usually characterized it, to the point of taking a cigarette as he walked around the room to where the "goddess of Governor Warmoth had led him.

With a sigh of resignation, he thought to himself that what happened was not so unusual considering that the girl had always proven to be willful and temperamental. Now he seemed to have remorse.

- Did my behavior, Mr. Bishop? Ha! What do you think that my

husband has left me locked in this room, then brought me here by force? You men are such hypocrites! They frequent the brothels and give moral chair ... Well, you can save me sighs. You better spend your time explaining what all of you are stuck. You, Paco, even my father, no less, playing cards ... Would not have been been a better excuse? "His elegant foot, wearing a sandal, hit the floor with rage. And as for Steven ... the joke is well deserved from what I have done. And you stop looking at me with those eyes suspicious and I do not come with a story about the "secrets". I remember very well when I went to look to Mexico to help him. If you trusted me then, Mr. Bishop, now insist that you tell me the truth!

By then, Mr. Bishop had recovered his usual aplomb. With his special way of talking without inflection, said coldly:

- But, my dear young lady, I'm on vacation! Even the men too busy, like me, you deserve some relaxation and fun! Steven and I met by chance and since the meeting occurred, I thought it was an opportunity for ... Could we say that to recapitulate some facts from the recent past? Really, ma'am, I see no reason why I have to give these explanations, if not for the unpleasant situation you brought down. Was it necessary for you to choose nothing less than the governor of Louisiana to be her ... their deliverer? If you will recognize in any social gathering ...

- He'll think your eyes deceive you or I have a double! No, Mr. Bishop, do not waste time or intend to be distracted by nonsense. Paco What are you doing here? Or is that too is on vacation? He gave Mr. Bishop a look of resentment. My God! The country led by some men who are dedicated to play cards! Or were waiting to board rooms?

- Lady! You are going too far! "Bishop said curtly, giving him a look that was intended to dread it.

Ginny shrugged her bare shoulder and sat gracefully on the edge of the bed, getting a little uncomfortable gentleman absently show leg uncovered.

"Maybe so," he admitted with a charming smile, but if you try to tell me the truth you'll realize you choose to have me on their side as the enemy. You know that well! And I am able to fight as well as a man ... If not, ask Paco. Or Steven, when fishing a tantrum ...

Mr. Bishop was perplexed, was one of the few times in his life when he was overcome. What's most unusual Taming! What could be done with a woman like that? How was it possible that Steven Morgan, one of his most serene agents had been caught by this woman to the point of forgetting all caution?

To tell the truth, seeing Ginny sighed and lying on the cushions, Mr. Bishop felt he was starting to get nervous. What the hell was going to do now? Is the role of Potiphar's wife?

To the chagrin of the young governor, the entertaining game of cards had broken down. She slipped in search of Lucille, the beautiful mulatto woman with whom he had an appointment, leaving glasses-sullen faces and bloated-to the guests whom their Aphrodite, had presented his compliments. It was possible to carry Lucille him to the opera, to shock the midwives who still believed to be arbiters of New Orleans society. Perhaps even more fun, also drag Oscar Dunn, the sanctimonious black lieutenant governor, especially if I made the plump Sigrid, the blue eyes of another pupil of Hortense also accompany them.

The first to open his mouth after the departure of the governor, was almost apoplectic senator.

- If you dare to tell Sonya! By God, Steven, I thought you ...!

"Not exactly the most docile of the women of this world, is not it, sir?

Steven's apparent indifference to making the comment, was denied by the flash of his blue eyes open wide for a moment, before concentrating his attention on empty half a bottle of brandy in the cup that had just ended.

"If I'm going to blame me for that ..." began the senator very heated and angry, before Davis was brought forward Paco.

- Do not you think we should think of rescuing poor Mr. Bishop?

His voice trembled slightly and, meeting with Steven indignant look, laughed.

- By God, man! Sorry. Also I apologize to you, Senator. You of course could not know, but when I said ... when I asked about our baby ...

"I think you forgot to mention the boy," said Steven's voice was cold and metallic. What the hell does all this mean? God Damn, Paco! If you can give me a reasonable explanation can be considered lucky to reach the hospital alive again!

Paco While trying to explain hurriedly, Sen. Brandon, who felt very uncomfortable, decided it was time to return with his wife. He hoped that his daughter realized that he must not hold his tongue and recover common sense. And if it seemed appropriate to give Steven the beating he deserved, for once he was not going to intervene.

With the mood I had at that time, the senator had completely forgotten that I had felt the curiosity to know what was the business that his son would propose at that meeting. Whatever, you might expect. Also that same night he had another appointment, on which Steven was not going to talk to until I know which side their sympathies were in the case of Cuba.

The evening had been a complete disappointment for everyone, including Ginny that neither threats nor blandishments, had not achieved anything of Mr. Bishop. This had been a smoke that smelled, making you feel sick, while insisting he was on vacation and had decided that Steven will use these to tie some loose ends that were left.

"Actually going back to my ... my homework tomorrow. This night was dedicated to the celebration.

Mr. Bishop seemed impatient to leave and to greater frustration, Ginny could not tell nothing in the expression of his face or in her deep gray eyes.

- And Paco? ...

"I think Mr. Davis plans to visit relatives in Mexico. I think he is

officially still on leave.

The cloud of blue-gray smoke cigar Bishop gave him an air at times demonic.

"I would be happy to accompany her back to the hacienda Alvarado ... You must be missing their children safe.

"Mr. Bishop, you are a man without a qualm is not it?

He bowed his head slightly.

- I have discovered, Mrs. Morgan! Quite accurate! May I wish you a pleasant journey back and thank him ... your help?

The saying goodbye. Neither more nor less. With what little effort he had kicked the board! The thought made him want to grit their teeth and scream with rage and helplessness. He forgot to keep his poise and jumped off with bare legs, only to see that, to his astonishment, the door closed. To hell with him and his threats to her back, now that I did not need it! And Steven ... What did it too?

A knock on the door blew Ginny, he realized, with an uncomfortable feeling, that still was not able to cope with Steven. But it was only the woman to whom he had called Hortense, who got into the room before she could answer at all.

- Hello, darling! You are really great you know?

Hortense sounded suspicious and suggestive as ever. Her eyes well versed and studied Ginny looked in the mirror while putting a lock in place.

"I should have known, I suppose, but I did not realize ... When Henry Warmoth really began to rave about you, I really did not know it was just you ... I came to find out why ...

Ginny turned to look at carefully.

- You want to stay, cherie? Is that why he left here? The truth is that men are so unsympathetic sometimes ... He could have called me and I would have prepared a few quotes. You are so different from the other girls I have! And I like having the widest range to offer ... Do you have enough experience, treasure?

Ginny had the crazy feeling that I was returning to the past by the

time tunnel, a train to breakneck speed. It seemed to be back in El Paso with Lila holding it and Lorraine, the French Canadian who had befriended and advised him he did not want to hear. The captive Steven ... "Is that why he left here?" The woman said. The girl was then panicked. But that was before I really knew what it was terror, before Tom Beal would have done that.

With an effort Ginny returned to the present. It was captivating and I was here and now. She was the wife of Steven and he could not get rid of it as and when wanted. Grace smiled at the woman. - Of course I have experience! Steven is a very special man ... As for staying here, I need to take a little time to decide and, besides, I promised to meet a friend at the opera tonight. Would not a dress I can borrow? Or perhaps a cape? This is just ...

Ginny glanced at Hortense disapprovingly as he blinked, obviously, to rearrange their ideas. Then he said doubtfully:

"Yes ... clear ... I guess I can give something ... But should have been up before. He took Lucille and Sigrid because he thought you were busy tonight. What a pity, is a man so generous! There would be missing anything if you decide to please him ...

It turned out that Hortense found Ginny's dress and gave her maid to have it ironed. And the same gentle and flirtatious wife, he lent his carriage to Ginny to take her to the opera.

"If someone else tries to steal it from me to your establishment ... Well, we have our own code as you are going to be taking notice. And come back tomorrow, I assure you will not regret it. Never am I demand too generous commission and ... Ask the other girls ...

"I should accept the offer and see what he said then. Oh, God! Why have we begun to play again? Why do these things to spite each other? I will not allow Mexico to send me without him ...

"Ginny's ideas whirling in her head as the wheels of the car that made sparks on the cobblestones as they went. His disgust was mingled with her fear that this time, this time, Steven's anger was final. It was so incapable of reason!

"But I will go across the bridges one by one and not let me bend."

Ginny repeated the phrase over and over again, straightening the body.

Chapter 6

There was always curious about the French Opera House at the corner of Bourbon and Toulouse. They went to see the singers come and discuss their recent performances. But he also watched with avid interest the lucky ones who could afford to enter such a place, to the elegantly dressed ladies and gentlemen, gossiping about the latest scandals.

It seemed that there were many who came late that night, something that never happened unless the function has no interest. But on this occasion that could not be the reason for delays as much as she sang the famous Adelina Patti, presenting for the first time in U.S. opera Mignon. What then was the reason for so many comings and goings? "There is something floating in the air" was whispered everywhere. Here came the governor hanging from each arm carrying two ladies dressed in affluence ("And we know of where has released!"), Followed by Oscar Dunn seemed quite uncomfortable and drowsy as if he'd jump out of bed. With his usual aplomb Mr. Warmoth said the timid cheers that greeted him. Then just as I finished the first act, came a young lady of exceptional beauty in a closed carriage. He climbed up the stairs leaving everyone by getting speculation about his identity. Am I late to play a role? Was the final conquest of the handsome tenor? It was so inappropriate for a lady arrived without an escort to the opera! Sure maybe not a lady but the flamboyant mistress of an adventurer. It was so difficult at that time to notice the difference! It seemed that the late arrival of Ginny had not gone unnoticed by anyone. That was all that consoled her chagrin. The polite discussion with the ordinances to convince them that she was a guest, gave time for the intermission came and the public to rush downstairs to take some refreshments. Never had he felt so curious and studied so critically! With real relief recognized one of the

youths who had been presented the night before that, recognizing also hastened gallantly to approach him asking if I could help on something.

- What kindness of her! The truth is that you have arrived in time to rescue me. I delayed for a small flaw in the car ... no, nothing serious ... But even if later it could not miss the show tonight. Is my ... I mean, Mrs. Brandon here? He must meet her, but I have no idea what stage has been invited.

Andre Delery kissed her hand a little longer than strictly necessary. "My pleasure her to the box of Mrs. Pruett. Just going over there to ask the ladies if they wanted a drink and I must confess that you've given me courage to do it ... My impression is that Ms. Pruett think I am responsible for the missteps of his precious Bernard. She looks at me with a cold lately! But tell me, "she smiled looking into her eyes with such graceful poise that made Ginny reminded Miguel Lopez, who had once been his mistress, may I invite her for a drink? Maybe a glass of champagne? Before I have to separate myself from you ... I hope you do not take me for a flippant ...

"Well ...

Ginny looked for a nice excuse for refusing, imagining Sonya's disapproval if she accepted the invitation of Mr. Delery and in that moment from the corner of eye saw Steven.

He was too busy to have seen it, concentrate on observing a beautiful Spanish-looking brunette and a splendid figure. Never mind too that the girl in question was accompanied by an older man who presumably was his father. Ginny was enough to recognize in the girl Ana Valdez-old bride-to Steven felt a surge of anger rise in his head.

Would that the real reason that he had taken much pains to keep her out of the opera that night? No doubt he would be convinced that at least gave him a good lesson and that, at this hour, she'd be where he had left or would have gone home. Instead, he was there, ready to draw worldwide attention.

Ginny rolled her eyes in mock modesty, playing with the range of ivory and lace.

- Are you a perfect gentleman, Mr. Delery! But I must away from his friends ... You will be here with his group ...

"Ma'am, I can assure the contrary, I'm here all alone. I share the stage with my friend Lucian Valette, but I'm sure not going to miss. Please give me a great pleasure to make some small service, let me tell you honestly, in order to prolong the pleasure of being at his side.

The two continued to account for their roles in the small courtship that preceded the moment when, in accepting the arm he offered, also accepted the promised champagne. Through his eyes languidly closed, Andre Delery had noticed that Steven had arrived earlier and without his wife, joining a group that Delery knew well. With a smile of good comedian, he hid the ideas that had crossed your mind.

Interesting situation, this! Also, very convenient for your purposes! The woman was really lovely and had a mouth that promised much to the man who could please her. And to top it had a fairly turbulent past, as the rumors had been heard the night before. Could it be that the fortuitous meeting was designed to kill two birds with one stone? Whatever happened, it seemed possible that he could lose.

The flexible and flattering Andre Delery, Ginny reminded him of a Spanish dancer. With his swarthy looks and her effervescent laughter Creole, was certainly a Don Juan, used to impose their will on women. He had proved little modesty, to say that his company could tarnish, perhaps, the reputation of a married woman. But in these circumstances ... Ginny lifted her chin stubbornly She knew caring! She was sure that Mr. Delery too. He put his hand on his arm and saw that he ran a rather wry smile as he said softly

- I assure you I have become the most envied man tonight! I can hardly believe my luck.

The appearance of her stepdaughter's arm scatterbrained Andre Delery, Sonya Brandon went to the drop of water that overflowed the glass, turning an unpleasant evening catastrophe. Indeed Sonya was beside himself. First William, abruptly abandoning the vain pretext that he had emerged an important business matter. So it was at the mercy of the thinly veiled curiosity Adeline Pruett and his allusions about a past she'd rather forget. After Steven, appearing without Ginny, in a box right in front of them, with a group of people from whom Sonya had ever heard. "Powerful Cubans," he had whispered Adeline.

- What a coincidence that your son knows them! Especially the young ... Very beautiful in its naturalness, right?

At this point in the evening, Sonya, with clenched teeth, stated that there could-should-not a minute longer bear the company of Mrs. Pruett. How could he ever have considered a friend? He had been continually making suggestions, stopping just before telling him directly that he had recognized the Yankee captain Steven Morgan to be his mistress. Naturally Adeline had taken good care to remember that it was precisely those who had encouraged love, crazy and unfortunate, after being booted first confession.

View Ginny then appear, asking you please to warn that Steven had decided to accept the invitation of Mr. Delery to dinner with him after the show. No, that was really the height ... Sonya gave him a headache, this time, was not feigned.

How could Ginny lacked so much in tact and into the arms of Mr. Delery so blatantly? Did not she realize that her unusual attitude, bypassing all the conventions could lead to a duel? Steven Morgan was a man so violent ... A cold blooded murderer ... Is that Andre was not aware of what might come to pass? Sonya's hands were sticky and a little nausea uncontrollable by drowning. William! Where was William? I wanted to go home!

"Listen, dear, and forgive the abruptness of an old woman-the

pragmatic acuity Adeline Pruett, tensions eased and attracted the attention of others. I've known him for so long that I'd rather not remember, Andre. You know that well. This can not you see, even in these modern times, there are things that our society will not tolerate here. Invite to dinner a young married woman, under the nose of her husband, can only bring trouble and I'm not going to allow, do you hear? Nor do I knit your brows, young lady! Should be warned ... And if what you believe is that a woman can do what men do ... Well you are very wrong! Men can do whatever they want, that's something we women have learned to endure ... At least until things change! It's your reputation that is at stake, not his. And you have to think of anyone more ... Do not you have one or two children?

"What a piece of witch! Ms. Pruett has always terrified me! "

Sonya thought that Mr. Delery certainly was not easily intimidated man. He was a gentleman and a tremulous smile hidden beneath the words barely whispered, as she tried to return everyone to feel comfortable, despite its unusual stepdaughter, naturally, would not accept to be jerky. As for Sonya, she could not help feeling relieved and even grateful to Mrs. Pruett, having come to their aid. I was so relieved that pretended not to notice when Andre's fingers touched his. It was naturally almost involuntarily, just to make him forget the reckless conduct of Ginny.

Warm fingers touch her again under the cover of darkness of the box and Sonya gasped, embarrassed by the blush that covered her cheeks. He whispered, leaning over her:

"Sorry to have caused ... Are you a woman so sensitive, right? I guessed from the beginning. Has anything improved your headache? "And, almost inaudibly," What hands are cold! I would be entitled to warm them!

Nonsense! It was an older woman, married, and he was getting too bold. I should put in place, gently but firmly. Sonya could not silence but the beat of his heart or avoid hearing a voice from the depths of his soul, told her that was not so old as to be unable to

flirt a little. What was wrong with that?

Ginny was too busy with their own thoughts as to realize the embarrassment of his stepmother. Steven, with that nasty Ana-precisely she among women of this world, with whom he had probably spent the night ... Do not end up never perfidy and unfaithfulness? And why would he require her to bear it? If you throw arrows with green eyes had been real, he would have been fatally shot several times. The opera had ceased to interest him, was busy plotting how to make good the damage caused him Steven. If the blatant Mrs. Pruett had not intervened, it would be her and not that bitch Anne who would now be in the limelight. The only way to defend against the inconsiderate behavior of Steven, was to pay in kind, fighting every inch of ground. Thanks to that had managed to keep so far.

Without realizing it had started to bite his lips, let out a sigh. Why was the same thing happening? Just when they had come to know and become friends ... "We are two volunteers and a bad temper," he warned. Do not know Steven well as yourself?

"Damn the depth of your eyes wild, my dear! I do not like me stuck like this! "When I said a few days ago that only would you be kidding? Or was it a warning?

"Perhaps never come to understand Steven or know why I love him. Do you really want him or the things I say are just a way to keep me happy so I could drive? "The anger and helplessness that had brought her to tears, Ginny had gone to introspection and submission. Oh, my God! How much longer would fighting, without trusting each other, always on guard? He should have stayed in Europe, saving all this pain and all this anguish.

Suddenly he felt an enormous decision and behind his eyes filled with tears of self pity him. How useless was all! So much anxiety, misery, the constant interplay between love and hate, why? "To try to keep a man who would not be won unless it was imposing its own terms? Why go through life not knowing what was the security? "I really do not know what I" thought Ginny painfully.

Not even fight for Steven gave encouragement.

Mrs. Pruett seemed to read his thoughts. The old woman bowed ceremoniously to her to whisper that should draw the interest of the people by the singers, to go before the start of intermission. Would Mrs. Morgan then meet with your husband? Ginny replied ceremoniously also no, absolutely not want to disrupt business engagements of her husband. But if Mrs. Pruett did not mind, could have back home.

The short laugh from Mrs. Pruett sounded like a growl.

- Are not you a little woman peevish? Believe me I like, although I had to calm her a while ago for its own sake. It reminds me a little that I was his age although I must admit that I lack some of the poise that you wish I would have done half of the freedom of your own! I had no freedom until after the war when, as a widow, I had my daughters well married. Hum! Now I can do what I want, but at my age, what good is free? What I learned is to be discreet. A woman can succeed in any mess if discreet and careful in choosing their lovers Do you understand me?

Ginny had had enough of the unexpected and almost shocking secrets of his hostess, when she, fanning herself growing stronger, even approached him saying softly.

- Andre Delery is not a good choice at this time! I know it is a very handsome man and a perfect lover, but it is dangerous. Exalted to the recklessness and duelist first. I hear that is not discrete, at least when you're with your buddies. And if I had not assumed that you are too smart to be attracted to what I'm saying about him, had not opened his mouth Andre is very ambitious, I like to use women and not just a certain way! Well, I guess I have said enough. At least you know you hear.

"What do you expect me to say? It has led me to open my mouth.

"Ginny could not help being intrigued by the unexpected and flattering words of Mrs. Pruett, though he could not get used to the idea that the midwife hardened by the years, there have never been lovers . As for Andre Delery, the girl seemed so intent on the words

of Sonya, Ginny thought that he was wrong to interpret the brightness shortly before their eyes. At that time did not seem dangerous at all and, anyway, Ginny was too preoccupied to deal with it. Like Sonya was wondering where I would be spending the evening Senator Brandon. And Steven, where do you think the night?

When the lights announced the end of the second act, neither Steven nor his company were in sight. Ginny willingly agreed to the request of Sonya, who suggested he retire early because his head was exploding with pain.

Mrs. Pruett offered his carriage, "because he returned to his son Bernard," he said with determination, causing the boy and his bride exchanged a look of disgust. And Andre Delery politely insisted on escorting the ladies to the plantation, "because it was right in his path," he said.

Much later, Ginny realized that the entire scene had been faked. But how to know at that time? She was too overwhelmed by their own thoughts to pay attention to others. Steven had decided to face and force him to maintain a serious conversation. Does he not realize he could not go on like this? Hardly heard that Andre had met them in the car, leaving his horse just trotted behind them. But Andre it was aware of the presence, despite the apparent intensity with which he looked at the blonde woman. She, her Virginia Morgan, the copper-haired beauty arrogant as fire, sunken chin stubbornly stood, looking straight into my eyes ... He had promised himself he would make his and his instinct told him it was fruit in season, ready to fall, tired of a husband who exhibited their lovers too openly. Oh, yes, but not now be yours, not yet! The wait would serve to more strongly desire. The question was to make her wait, and after, would come to give in like everyone else.

Chapter 7

- Did your ears are burning the bastard?

Paco white teeth flashed Davis under the thin black mustache, in a

smirk. The question was addressed to Mr Bishop who returned with downcast smile.

"I doubt that. Andre Delery is accustomed to be talked about much of it around here. The thing is, we know you are paying. Until they pay the tailor! The question is exactly who is paying and why.

The question was rather rhetorical. Mr. Bishop was a pretty good idea about what were the services for which Mr. Delery was receiving remuneration. He was a noted duelist in a city where the affairs of honor "-were formally prohibited but common. But while used in the past Delery fight only with spouses or relatives of women who had been mocked by him, recently was fighting men of certain political beliefs. The Cuban conflict was launched on New Orleans, a flood of refugees in search of support, either to the Spanish who wanted to save the little that remained of the ancient splendor, either to the rebels who wanted independence. To complicate matters, there appeared a third group, future American filibusters, always ready to exploit the conflicts in neighboring countries for their own benefit.

If Jim Bishop had not been so self-control, had released a sigh. He looked across the room to meet with the blue eyes narrowed Steven Morgan and his face expressionless. Morgan was expected to keep his mind on that night in business and not its angry wife. It was a shame the damage the marriage he could make a man, excellent in all other respects.

The cigarette smoke coming through the window that Steven had just opened. Outside the stars were beginning to fade ready to be eclipsed before the next sunrise.

Steven scratching his beard with impatience, waiting for Bishop came on. It was the first time he wondered how he had been persuaded to get involved in this intrigue. The black eyebrows were joined by Steven frown. Now that he had had time to think, had concluded that they had managed to put in this situation. A few weeks ago, Bishop could you ask your friend, Colonel Belmont, he and his soldiers leave the zealous search for Manolo,

the outlaw, through the swamps. Instead he was forced to flee, carrying the body escabulléndole Ginny and not only bullets but also predators of the swamp. Then when they finally reached Shreveport, Paco fell to Davis. Always seemed that the coincidences were needed so that Jim appeared in his life!

Steven said sarcastically:

- Why have not asked just that the irascible Mr. Delery? It may have been mad enough to answer or that I had become mad enough to kill him.

Bishop surprised him with a thoughtful look before making a slight nod and respond with some regret:

"I think it should provoke a duel with this man. Not yet. No, we know that is next to the Spanish and it is not so short of funds as used to be. Of course we know what they're doing, but ...-. His eyes darkened for a moment while lit another cigarette. Are the activities of his father the most concern me. It is unfortunate that the meeting with him, so laboriously prepared, was down. If he already has spoken with the gentlemen who have in their sights and is committed to them in some way, do you think you can do change their minds?

I do not know.

Steven turned to the table and threw himself full length on the couch, another glass.

"I was quite disgusted by how I disappear from sight. And do not think I have forgiven all.

"For me it is hard to believe that among you can speak with some education. Do you remember the first time we met to talk about the gold that was shipped through Mexico? Now ...

Paco is back in his chair, shrugging his shoulders peacefully, and turning to Steven said:

"Now the same thing can happen, eh, buddy? The good senator Brandon is an ambitious man. I do not think much has changed.

What do you think?

Bishop watched the two methodically reviewing loose a lot of data, selected and grouped to form a whole. Paco was right.

Brandon was not just ambitious but greedy. And suddenly took an interest in Cuban affairs, to be sailing point of buying a plantation in Cuba. A ruined plantation at a price he could not afford. Why? The whole thing was somehow also connecting with Andre Delery. And the beautiful young widow of a Cuban farmer who had been engaged to Steven, Ana Dos Santos? There were many loose pieces of this puzzle, but he would get them together. The president had been very clear about his instructions that the status quo in Cuba and the U.S. neutrality should be maintained. At least for now, he added to himself cynically Bishop.

He leaned over the table.

"Gentlemen, it is dawning and we all pretty tired. I suggest that everyone think a bit what has been discussed and that we arrange a meeting for tomorrow. Does this seem a good night? Let's see what awaits the new day.

For many, the day started very early, for others brought many surprises. Lucian Valette had planned to sleep until late afternoon when he threw himself fully clothed in bed, feeling terribly sorry for the amount of alcohol he had taken. Surely it would have bared his servant, when he finally awoke, he brought a glass of an infusion, Pierre's own unique recipe, infallible remedy for the worst hangover. Lucian what I least expected was to meet his friend Andre Delery, trying to wake him despite their cries of protest, finally getting open sore and reddened eyes.

- No, whatever I'm not able to hear it! The noise in my head is too strong. Bon Dieu! How is it possible that Pierre left you in? I will fire the rascal and I'll challenge you just be a little better ...

- Nonsense! You know that you will not dismiss and which I would kill you if you were to challenge me ... you know my reputation in

this regard. Wake up and listen, Lucian! I have asked the good man to make you one of his special brews ideas understand nothing, because it is important that we talk.

Still clutching his head with both hands, Valette sat in bed reluctantly, wondering how on earth it was possible that managed to look so cool and so awake after a sleepless night last surely. When Andre finished, already had happened to all the drowsy Lucian and only the throb of his temples remember the excesses of the previous day.

- Do not be serious! When we made this stupid bet, was not to accomplish your goal of challenging the husband. Just think about the consequences, mon ami. After all he is not one of ours and their position ... Look, what I'm trying to explain is that it would create a scandal of the devil. Moreover, the consequences for you ...

Delery's brown eyes narrowed to look at the flushed face and worried about his friend.

- You mean I have to fear the consequences? I will not pick a quarrel with you, mon vieux, abusing your mal de tête. Besides, "laughed openly-Delery need your help. Not to fulfill the goal, of course! That would be too easy. The work of softening the bird is done and now just waiting to fall into the trap. Have I ever missed a woman? Have I stopped killing an opponent? This particular opponent will challenge me in front of witnesses, I am sure, without leaving me no choice, unless it be ... "extending his hands, shrugged Delery. Do you understand? But I need information. Know who your friends. Especially those with whom he was last night. I understand that after the opera spent the night in some house of Bourbon Street ...

As the two men spoke, most of the inhabitants of the plantation that is still known by the name of Casa Beaudine, was already awake. Ginny coming down the stairs with the idea of seeking

refuge in the garden shaded by trees and a good breakfast, he found to his surprise that his stepmother was already up and, apparently, harboring his own intentions.

The two women looked at Sonya, and was very pale if not for two red spots on her cheeks that spoke first.

"No need to do ceremonies. Sit. And with the same familiar tone continued: "The servants are eager to gossip, of course. Whatever the differences, or has been, among us, it is best to pretend to business as usual. Do not you think?

Given the silence of Ginny, Sonya's knuckles whitened from the pressure of the chair arms.

- Your husband has not returned, right? And mine came back two hours ago, with the story that he had spent the night playing cards. Now snoring, sound asleep.

Under his apparent composure, Sonya was boiling with rage. How was it possible that William the evidence put in front of all his old friends? Missing for two days straight without having the finesse to offer a plausible excuse and above afford to rebuke for agreeing to be escorted by three young! Although, "he remembered Mr. Delery was not much younger than her because, as he had said, laughing despite their appearance was well over thirty years.

Sonya looked at Ginny who, ensconced in a chair opposite her, still mired in absolute silence except for a barely audible "Oh ?»... Ginny may be better prepared to fight against the perfidy of men. No doubt she would already be thinking of a lover who would take revenge for Steven. And judging by his past, Ginny had lovers and allowed amorous escapades with extraordinary ease. And what was worse, he always managed to get ahead! "It's not fair-thinking rebel-who always manages to get away with it."

He looked maliciously, while Ginny took off his hat and began to fan him languidly. The younger women seemed not to have slept a wink all night, which was probably true. He had big dark circles and unusual paleness in her cheek. Had he really believed that would change a man like Steven?

Ginny was thinking the same thing while still swinging, more to keep your hands busy than to cool off. She knew that Sonya was scrutinizing and the rage, but after all, what they both have in common? In the recent past had been addressed more clearly and honestly as adversaries than as friends. No, no mood to be confident of Sonya and to hear their accusations. In fact, I did not think anything had happened quite as he lay in bed awake.

The servants crowded around to bringing steaming sources were placed on the table laid for four. Ginny served crispy bun hungry, watching over melted butter. Absently more for the servants to listen to something else, said:

- Are they always so well prepared breakfasts in Louisiana? Five and six-course! How could serve well every day?

Sonya shrugged.

"It's a matter of habit. You get used to.

China blue eyes met those of Ginny and continued with a familiar tone:

"But once you get used to being abandoned and humiliated? How can you stand?

- Can not bear it!

The servants had retired, and with them the need for discretion.

Given the violent response of Ginny, Sonya's lips tightened.

- Oh! He said sharply. But you're still his wife. You have not done the whole trip up here and go back to convince him? Forgive me if I've come to false conclusions, but ...

The stubborn and indignant tilt of the chin of Ginny it was known by others.

"Yes, indeed. But I really do not care. Steven and I ... you could never understand how things are really among us, is not it? Do not think you can ever understand. He makes his life and I mine.

Please do not expect it to be as disgusted as you no doubt you are!

By guessing the fit of rage in the face of Sonya, Ginny said impatiently:

- Go, go! What sense does it continue quarreling among ourselves?

We both know very well where we are. Let sleeping dogs lie.
"Everything is so easy for you, right? Whenever you have felt owner to take action on your whims without caring nothing for others or the pain or punishment that could cause ... While I ... Oh ... As you say, what does it matter? Enjoy your breakfast, I'll give you a ride.

He said almost without thinking, they said Sonya later. Just because I could not go on putting up sitting at the whore that arrogantly defied. And without thinking, rode alone to the mare briskly, feeling the cool breeze eased the heat of her cheeks. He had not passed through the path leading to the bluffs of the river! And this time take care not to approach the old stone brothel. After the abrupt departure of Sonya, Ginny appetite vanished. He did not need a hearty breakfast. The bagel and black coffee with drops of brandy, was more than enough unless I wanted to be plump. Unhappy idea! Ginny almost regretted having given way to argue with Sonya. A good ride was just what I needed to remove the nightmares off and begin again to function normally. Despite the endless vigil and forgeries of last night had not taken any decision nor had made any plan. All he had achieved was to recognize, with a fatalism unbecoming of their nature, things could not go on as before. Once and for all she and Steven had to be convinced.

"I love him, he thought. But Steven and she had gone away in such a short time, the idea that astonished her. "If you continue like we will end up destroying each other and destroy so that now exists between us, call it what you will." Steven ... Was it anger or indifference that pulled him away from her?

I should find out and face the consequences. Thank God, pride still kept right! No, not run away again as Sonya had just done. And whatever it was, this time would force Steven to tell the truth.

"And the truth will give me freedom." Why that phrase, repeated by Ginny feverishly over and over again, sounded death knell? Half a dozen times he was about to turn. A point of telling the old

coachman who was driving with that little buggy, which had changed his mind. Disapproval would be even higher if I knew what kind of house he was ordering to go. Increase the downstairs gossip and Sonya would feel horrified. She did not care, Ginny was said stubbornly. I needed to know the truth.

"Here," said Ginny in an effort from his thoughts. Please leave me here. No need to wait for me because my husband back with me.

Very much in spite of herself, Ginny had been permitted to imagine all possible situations that Steven could find "but to be prepared against him than for tantrum fished justified beforehand. The only image I had conjured Ginny, was to find him sleeping alone.

Not even close Steven Morgan had planned to spend the night alone. What was decided was to send to Jim Bishop and his friend Paco to the devil himself y. .. Damn!, Looking from Ginny and show him once and for all that ...

And in that moment, Hortense, her eyes heavy with sleep and yawning, had delivered the note. A large parchment envelope with a stamp that I knew him too well and a few lines short and laconic. Does the Bishop's trump card? It was too coincidental that a letter from his grandfather, sent by Renaldo, I came right here and at that time. He looked at the outstretched hand of Don Francisco, trying to read between the lines despite the sense of fatalism that was wrapping. Everything she might have pointed the way toward Cuba. What strange business had been nothing less than his grandfather into Cuba to make arrangements in the midst of a revolution that promised to be bloody? Damn proud old! At least could have sought to Renaldo. And again, without having fully recovered from his wound, in no way should travel alone anywhere.

Steven released several oaths before burning the paper in the ashtray. I never could get along with his grandfather. Now would also have to endure the tantrums of Ginny, if I knew that was

going to send back to Mexico alone.

The first light that filtered through the window, they found Steven trying to close my eyes. He felt he would soon need all the rest that could be taken at that time ... Why the hell, as soon picked up the dream, he filled the head of myriads of confusing images? It had happened at other times, they were unconscious feelings that appeared whenever I was about to begin a new mission. Ginny once had accused him of indulging in flirting with danger. "I think my restless soul of a demon, my love," she had answered him.

Ginny, tempting tigress Nemesis siren! No matter how ruthless it may be the struggle between them ... Ginny was the kind of woman who could ever keep a man interested and on guard. A witch with green eyes, teeth and sharp claws ...

It took a few seconds to adjust their dreams to reality when he saw her and his first reaction on seeing her bending over him was take her in his arms. But the reason was stronger than the instinct and the little rest he had taken was enough to sharpen your senses.

When meeting with probing eyes of Ginny, hardened his own, convinced that she should ask the separation easier and easier the decision to send him back.

Chapter 8

- Good morning! I thought we could have breakfast together like we did yesterday. We need to talk, do not you think?

Steven closed his eyes before he smiled rather was a mouth-puckering.

- Do you think we have to speak truly, madam? Y. .. as we are, where you spent the night?

Was thus determined to be unpleasant. A Ginny let out a sigh on her lips parted, before making a determination.

-Steven, no, please no. I'm tired of fighting. What happened to the loyalty that we promised each other?

Almost desperately searched her face for some sign of goodwill, but only got a cold shrug while throwing his long legs out of bed,

began to get the pants in any way, as if she were not present. He could not even see his face when he said indifferently:

"I had no idea that we were not being honest with each other ... according to our respective understandings. You wanted to discuss something in particular?

She was insistent. That should recognize. To prove that he knew his tactics, his lips with rebellious gesture.

"Indeed, indeed. I want to discuss our ... relations between us. No. .. I'm not satisfied with how things are going. Do you?

He looked forward to.

- For Christ! Have you come here for breakfast and ask questions without rhyme or reason? We are married and told me we have some twins that are your responsibility. If you are not happy living with me in my way, there is no reason not to live in another, more in tune with your taste. So far I have been a husband rather than comprehensive, is not it? While you try to remember to be a little more discreet than you were last night, I try to control my temper. Does not it seem quite reasonable proposal?

Ginny stood his ground. His eyes were bright without being able to tell if it was of anger or tears.

- I'm supposed to be punished? Is that the reason for your studied cruelty, Steven? Or do you prefer that we return to live as we lived before going to Europe? I assure you'll have to answer if you want rid of me.

"I thought you were more than satisfied with our way of life, dear. And living as best pleases you when I'm around. When in Mexico no doubt find new excuses to travel ... Although I would prefer you to wait a bit until the kids are a little older before letting them back. She laughed briefly. You're stubborn as a mule. It is appropriate to remember that I do not like to control my movements.

For some reason he was being deliberately cruel. Ginny knew it but knowing it was not enough palliative to save his wounded pride. He could only make a graceful exit.

"Okay, Steven. I remember him also remember that if you hate the scenes of jealousy. He shook slightly. Do you think Hortense serve me breakfast? Or will Gov. Warmoth still here?

It was certainly unfortunate for both at that time sounded a knock at the door. They were looking at each other. Steven, his shirt still unbuttoned, trying to imagine the reason for the sudden change of mood Ginny.

- Is it possible? I was told that I was waiting ... Oh ...

- Go! Sure was waiting! I am confident that Steven will explain that we are a modern couple and each has its own friends.

Occasionally it's fun to compare!

Ana Dos Santos, with its large, velvety eyes wide open, seemed to have matured a lot since Ginny saw her last. He stood leaning against the doorjamb as if for protection, staring at Ginny.

"Try the oysters," continued Ginny, are excellent. And the champagne too. And I see that I am ... Excuse Ana .. Dear I'm not going to dinner at home. Henry invited me to a reception given in the governorate. Au'voir, and a good time!

Ginny felt his feet since his will not take her beyond the stunned young and away from the stony face of Steven. While this table is kept fixed in his mind, would not fall. When I was in the middle of the stairs, Ginny heard the door close upstairs.

William Brandon saw Ginny coming towards him across the lobby entrance. I was so worried about their own affairs than not notice the unusual pale face of his daughter. He was surprised to remember that he was still angry with her and her voice was curt:

- God! Where the hell have gotten all? Where is Sonya?

"I have no idea. All I know is that early this morning went for a ride. Why do not you look?

- Listen, Virginia, not because you are a married woman you can afford to talk like that! As for your conduct last night ...

"I've told you where I found last night Sonya, if that's what worries

you. Will you let me go? I've also been out and it really hurts my head.

"His" room, was only a temporary refuge. Lying in bed after drinking an ice pop that, solicitous, had brought the girl, Ginny tried to think calmly but one thing seemed to have some sense: she had to leave. And since Steven had left her free to follow their own inclinations, that is what I would do exactly. Ginny closed her eyes trying to fall asleep to not feel much pain. "It's over! In the end it's over! And how strange it seems! "

Through the window came the voice of Senator asking one of the servants to bring him a horse barn. Would you go in search of Sonya? He also was a man. It was therefore natural that would seek pleasure where he pleased, but his wife had to be safe from reproach, untouchable and untouched. Ginny suddenly found himself thinking that Sonya, after all, was much younger than her husband. Sonya Had loved her first husband, who had left the house and the land surrounding? Did you ever have had lovers? Despite having put some plump in recent times, Sonya was not in any way a woman unattractive. And by the way, that same thought Andre Delery.

While Ginny tried to keep his wandering thoughts away from everything that concerns their future plans, Sonya, in turn, began to want desperately to be back home, safe, putting the blame Ginny have caused it to act unthinkingly.

If William had not acted with such disregard and if Ginny had not provoked, Sonya had erased his memory of Andre Delery whispering in his ear that he would like to meet her, when she left to walk alone on horseback to return to talk together and show a book of French poems he had brought from his last trip to Paris. I had thought that was a nice man and a sensibility so exquisite ... But of course, a clandestine meeting with him or with any other man, of course, was unthinkable in normal circumstances. Mr. Delery had made it clear that he respected (not needed!), And he appreciated his opinion and conversation. There was no reason to

disbelieve him, that man was well received by all his old friends. And yet, God! How could she be so stupid and thoughtless? He had not even thought of meeting him. I just wanted to be alone and take a ride as he did in the past. He had been saying all these things, but none of them excuse the fact that Andre had been waiting Delery and that she had allowed him to socket a conversation.

The trees lining the mall cliffs of the river, were very old and had been planted by the first settlers of the area. Sonya had always enjoyed the picnics they used to do there in the shade covered with leaves. She and Raoul, that cheerful and handsome husband who had courted her, had caught his imagination and then the couple had married. Her husband ... he had loved his mistress more mixed than anything in the world ...

For a long time since I rode among the trees and hear the sound of water under the cliffs ... Too much time sitting, laughing, leaning against the gnarled trunk of an old tree, somewhat tipsy by Andre Delery ice wine had brought.

- "Bread and wine, a book of poems translated, they say, from Persian. I thought of you the first time I read it. I have to share these things with you ...

- You look like a poet himself, Mr. Delery! But you know you can not stay ... Not even I should have been ... Suddenly I felt the need to ...

- Please, just a few minutes now that he's here! Did you feel how I was eager to see here? How mentally called?

Before his gaze bewildered and confused, he laughed and took her hand.

"Do not be nervous. I have no intention of compromising. What can be wrong with this beauty and share this peace for a moment? Was persuaded. Later he could not explain why. At that time it seemed natural to stay and chat, after the trouble he had taken to get there. He must have told him politely that would do much better by sharing their picnics with young girls, more in keeping

with their age and, of course, single. But meanwhile he read poetry, sitting near her, offering freshly baked rolls with bits of goat cheese, all washed down with wine.

After all he was doing nothing wrong. How long did the taste did not satisfy a whim? Since when is not so much fun?

Delery Andre insisted on occasion entertain casually that she realized that time was passing. It also worked to keep the cup always filled with such foresight, had brought with him. He read poems and told humorous anecdotes that made her laugh, always calculating how long it would take ... Then ... when last heard the first sounds so minor that had been waiting, interrupted the story and told him, leaning so close to her that made her tremble, he said:

- Do not move! It has a wasp ... no, do not panic, it's going to scare ...

He brushed his neck with her hand while she gave a little cry of fright. It seems natural that, almost without transition, he holds his head and kissed her parted lips.

The scene, of course, could mean more of what really happened. A kiss ... but it seemed as if the two had lost the balance, because Sonya had her back and covered the body of Delery almost entirely theirs when they heard coughing behind them with great pregnancy.

- Oh, a thousand pardons, my old friend, but I did not know ...! How could anyone assume you'd also just choose this site for your date?

Sonya felt die. And the truth is I would rather fall dead at the time that have to deal with them. Dealing with the obviously distraught faces and Bernard Valette Lucian Pruett and astonished looks of the young girls who accompanied them.

Valette incoherent remarks, only made things worse. He said he had come up the river ... it was a beautiful day ... Sonya stretched the dress and wanted to have the courage to lie to mourn. The servants came bearing baskets, blankets and pillows. Bernard's

girlfriend was accompanied by a middle-aged aunt, frowning, looked at Sonya with a look of disapproval. She went from flush to the extreme pallor, while Andre was a rush to give explanations.

- Lucian! Well, I must say I found Mrs. Brandon giving a ride and convinced her to take a break in the shade of the trees ...

Andre did not seem so easy man to lose his composure or the gift of speech. She looked at Sonya and whispered:

- I'm so sorry!

But what those words served him to save his reputation?

Sonya was very familiar to the society of New Orleans and knew that that night the story-in increasingly exaggerated versions-will be telling in the classroom and in the tables. Soon all the world would whisper!

Everyone started talking at once, trying to save face. All but Sonya that although it was her life, could not say a word.

It was this scene forced and strained, which caught the eye of William when he showed up on horseback. Their presence in the place, and after Mr. Delery said his friend Valette-was pure coincidence and a gift from the gods for the achievement of Andre. The senator had known that his wife had been caught with his mistress for the inevitable gossip that, surely, sooner or later come to his ears. Instead the senator had appeared on the scene so carefully prepared, at the right time so he could draw their own conclusions.

- For the love of God! Try to stay calm, hysteria is not going to do any good!

Ginny's voice sounded stronger and more impatient than I would have liked, but was not used to withstand the attacks of nerves Sonya.

-Continued ... Do you good to talk to me about it. What happened next? Could not you explain? At least you would have given the benefit of ...

"What I want to say ... what I mean ... Oh, my God, how can you understand? You have not grown up here as I've grown! They are going to beat ... there is no way ... of ...! I want to die ... I want to die!

"But you will not die, Sonya. Listen! Do not you realize that the only way out of step is confronting and challenging! That's what you have to do ... for your sake and also for my father. Let me talk to him and Steven.

- No! No, no, no! Sonya's voice was pure regret. I can not face it, neither he nor others. I am guilty, I am guilty! ... It's my punishment after so many years ...

- You are talking nonsense! Here comes the doctor will give you something to calm the nerves. I will see what I can do to fix this nonsense you and promise me calm down. You're not going to help anyone while in this state!

Despite the strength of his words, Ginny realized she was trembling when leaving the room Sonya. This was not how she wanted to forget their own problems. Poor Sonya! All life governed by conventions, ultimately doomed to fall for them ... And his father to become involved in a duel ... well, that was even more ridiculous. The scandal would be far greater and the consequences would be unpredictable. He should have trusted his wife. Why were men so suspicious and distrustful? As Steven ... always willing to think the worst ...

Ginny noticed that his hands were cold and wet to put them together. Furious with herself for having behaved like a fool, left his position beside the door Sonya's room and went downstairs, hoping to find the senator still there. We had to make him understand that fight with Andre Delery, both mean the ruin of his political career and the disqualification of his wife. Yes, that would be the best way to approach things. If it was not, he would see what could be done Steven. Ginny pursed her lips a moment. Steven never would back the case of a duel. When I first saw it, was from the window of his hotel room in San Antonio. He had

just killed a man in the dusty street. And was forced to watch, with his bare hands, killed on the deck of the Russian Prince who had been her first "husband". The way Steven would choose to avoid the duel between the senator and Delery, would challenge himself to Delery. Already it why should you care? From the start, had known or should have known "what kind of man was Steven. He had not intended at any time be otherwise. So the mistake was his and also his dreams and illusions that he had wanted done ... With a fairy tale ending where everyone "would be happy for eternity," where everything bad is good again for the prince and princess or knight and the lady, as in the tales he had read as a child .

The whole house seemed lost in the silence, a silence full of murmurs that seemed to deepen as the shadows were lengthening and the sun was hidden behind open windows. In the hall feeling strangely empty and the pungent aroma that floated yet sweet lemon, Ginny suddenly remembered that night had guests for dinner. Had someone been countermanded? Or is she supposed to do by going to dinner?

Ginny hoped to find the senator in his office, where he had locked himself but to his surprise he found the door wide open and half-frightened butler who explains that the gentleman had gone out again y. .. "No, ma'am, certainly would not say where. And then hope they had of his father's face gave way to hope for another which was not ready yet.

- What is happening here?

It was of course Steven. Steven, with his black eyebrows raised, at the time she turned to face him with upturned chin.

- Well?

Her eyes were fixed on it as if you were measuring and had decided to attack first. Ginny looked back at him, accepting the challenge.

- Are you going to give a chance to explain?

Then, briefly, told him what happened while mentally enjoyed the surprise showed on his face before he had time to rebuild it for her.

At the same time, to his astonishment, took her arm and led her to the office, sending the servant with an impatient gesture. He had posed as the friendly right after having rejected so so wicked!

- Sonya How had become so fond of Delery? Damn! I thought it was you who he was in the spotlight ... Would not you noticed that there was anything between them?

- God! Is that all you have to say after all that has happened?

Trembling with rage, Ginny off his arm, leaning back.

- You thought it was me who was the target! Which naturally you say! Y. .. y. .. Oh, sometimes I wonder if you even know if you ever have any feeling that is not dictated by convenience or your desires! Did not matter what you may come to pass? Not even the consequences of what happened this afternoon? Sonya is prostrated by grief and guilt, poor creature! She is not exactly the kind of woman to be embarking on similar trouble ... Straight always so ... I'm sure he met him by chance and that my father, in typical male gesture has made a scandal at all. I came to talk to him but he's gone who knows where and I'm afraid ...

He was looking fixedly with that impassive face he used to have in recent times and it caused much resentment. Only grin showed he was able to have some feeling. Was watching instead of listening and, noticing it, Ginny was furious beat point of wanting to get a reaction that, at least, was real.

Under well-cut jacket thick dark blue cloth, Steven shrugged his shoulders carelessly, further enraging Ginny, as she said sarcastically:

"I'm sure your ... your father had informed where I was and what, if I'd known you were going to worry, my love. But now that I have arrived and have been kind enough to tell me what happened ... I guess you told me everything, right? Or is that Sonya has found Delery, mistakenly believing that this way you protect yourself? Because of something I think you're right, I do not see Sonya ran a clandestine meeting with a man as notorious as Delery Andre ... If he wanted to provoke a reaction, the success was complete.

Mute with rage, Ginny slapped him, feeling he shook his arm at the shoulder when he grabbed her by the wrist.

- Son of a bitch!

"You should act accordingly and either return the slap, Ginny. Do not tempt fate or you'll have to explain the origin of some bruises.

"Do not be the first time, is not it? Damn you, Steven! I will not try and stop! I will not live like that! I want a normal life! You hear me? I do not want to live in a permanent armed truce between renditions and enforced which I'm never sure. Damn you! Damn you! I want to ... Let me go! I want a divorce. You said you would give me, remember? And I will not allow this ... our marriage, and continue dragging until we finish hating ...

He had forgotten his father, Sonya and all that had led to this situation. Without realizing it, had begun to mourn with rage, pain and, mostly, impotence, seeing that, as usual he did to her what she wanted while she was the one that showed to have feelings. Steven stood by and watched with that devilish sneer on his lips and one eyebrow raised. He had no interest in it. If I had been welcomed into the arms. Scarcely a month that he had told him that I loved her and never let her go. Were you just out of pride for people not to say that she had left? Was it just the pride that kept them together until now?

He released her wrist, letting the massaging with surly gesture, struggling to control his nerves. His voice sounded slightly annoyed and impatient.

- Wow, Ginny! Are you going to continue with the same old story?

My answer also remains the same: No! No divorce, my love. I Want to be the victim of some other girl who is looking for a husband? No, there is a lot. Besides is not that precisely the most opportune time for another juicy scandal, do not you think? I'm afraid you'll have to settle for a woman remain married until I decide it's time to take different paths, formally understood. Meanwhile, if you have something on your head, you realize you should have some discretion. I also try to have it. Then we can

both swim and eat. When you pass the tantrum, you'll agree with me.

It would have been better than the slap again. I would have preferred a thousand times that backlash, but honestly, humanly, that he snapped this discursive logic, that was inhumane rout. Everything must be done to your liking, naturally! The feelings it should not be taken into account! As if it ever had been! And yet, Ginny felt her mouth escaped the words but they could be controlled, as if someone stronger than her, force her to say them. She needed to know.

- Do not you love me? Is that what you're trying to say?

- Damn, my love! Is that the only thing that occurs to them to ask the women? I slapped a moment ago, you said you hated me and now you ask me to love you ...

I hated the way he shrugged his shoulders, how to look as far forward seen it. He hated her way of adding persuasively, as if he were speaking to a creature:

- Of course I love you, Ginny! You are my wife and, as I've reported, the mother of my children. We have both run well enough to know that we need some external stimuli, is not it? Oh, I admit I have the gift of myself desperately jealous sometimes, but try to control myself if you do the same. Are you satisfied now?

What would have satisfied him had been furious with her, feeling angry and wildly kissed her, which made him love and he said he loved her, it was theirs and nobody else, that would destroy if he betrayed it. But he did politely to one side, giving you the freedom, the freedom that obviously wanted for himself. Could it have something to do with Hannah his change of heart? Ginny wanted to scream the question, screaming, raging and kicking, putting together a real scandal. But he had placed in an untenable position, which could only escape if I wanted a way to keep your pride intact. Drying her tears with her hand, Ginny said between sobs:

- Damn! Why I mourn every time I pick a tantrum? Why I let you

hurt me?

She looked at him with his head high and defiant.

"I should not afford it and I'm not going to allow from now on. I can not be hypocritical, but with a teacher like you, try to learn and I'm sure I'll learn eventually. Please think about the divorce. I will do my best to be discreet in my private life and I agree with you that is not the best time to make more noise. But if I fall in love with another man, I'll go with him, to divorce or not, so it is entirely ... I refuse to live in the midst of falsehood.

He saw her leave the office straight and dignified.

Chapter 9

Mr. Bishop felt angry and upset at a time, but hid his feelings, being accustomed to not let them show it. However, there was a tinge in his voice, usually without inflections, Paco Davis did feel a little uncomfortable.

"Apparently they were smarter than we thought and able to strike where least expected. "So the senator has gone for a lawyer?

Presumably it will be to revoke the will ... And the encounter with Delery is for ...?

I knew the answer so well known as Paco, but he deliberately pause while he lit his cigarette, dropping the question through the table.

Paco said resignedly:

"It's supposed to meet tonight, so I've heard. The haste with which they are acting because they do not want the matter reaches the ears of the authorities to avoid any actions which may impede the thing. Should we ...?

Bishop, leaning back in his chair and watching the blue-gray smoke rings that had recently formed, seemed to consider the burning question. He admitted he was upset, it always annoyed be outdone.

Paco leaned forward, his dark eyes giving off a sudden brightness.

- Hey! You may have pushed Steven Delery this duel, eh? Nothing

more natural ... The senator is his father and is well known that Delery likes to kill their opponents. That is so feared by most people around here ...

"You should be aware of things better instead of imagining them," said Bishop coldly.

Paco jumped exaggerated.

"Well, it was just an idea ...

"Not very bright indeed. We Morgan in Cuba, as incognito as possible ... for as long as possible. In any case, if it is he who fights for Brandon, the senator will feel humiliated. No, I think there are less obvious ways to avoid this absurd duel ...

Bishop leaned forward, pinching his chin with his fingers as he laid out "other ways".

"He gave!" Thought Paco growling. "It's a bastard, is cold blooded but is smarter than Clarke!"

The same conclusion was Steven Morgan, appearing with a scowl, which reflected his bad temper, to join them. Throughout the journey to the city, had been stroking with some pleasure the idea of an immediate encounter with Delery to try to smooth things over and ease tensions between them. But of course, was Bishop with his head on straight, who had found the most obvious and practical solution of all. The best way to prevent the duel was, of course, invoke the law and to arrest all those involved. Of course, that would lead to some unpleasant incidents, but eventually ... Steven Morgan, no jacket, shirt wrinkled and unbuttoned, he deigned to raise an eyebrow as a sign of interest:

- And when we have them in prison?

"At least we will have gained time," said Paco, helpful.

Bishop replied with a curt rudeness:

"That is my problem.

Looked from one to another and said quietly:

"Meanwhile, gentlemen, you will prepare their things to leave immediately to Cuba, right?"

- I can not believe it! Just like old times ... Then you used to argue with me, but today he did not. Hey, Steven, you are not listening to his old friend ...!

- Shut up, Paco!

Steven was just as grumpy as he had been all day. The huge amount of alcohol that Paco and he had consumed since the abrupt departure of Bishop, had not helped. There was not even trying to concentrate on the map that Bishop had made so diligently on the table to memorize it. Steven leaned over him with a frown stop waiting for Paco harass him.

Cuba. How strange that he had never visited the island in spite of having an uncle there. Or was he a cousin? Wow! Some distant relative who had never taken into account. Stranger still, that his grandfather, who had never liked to travel, suddenly decided to go to Cuba on their own to meet a mysterious diligence. His letter full of admonitions and strict orders («... sarcastic when I advised you leave the farm a while to find out how things were outside, I figured you were going to spend more than a year ... and now that, for personal reasons I am forced to leave immediately to visit my possessions in Cuba, I hope you do not seem too inconvenient to return to Mexico ...»). Not passing any reference to personal reasons that Don Francisco had to travel. Neither the acquisition of possessions in Cuba. Such a course of action did not match the personality of his grandfather. Was the old man on the verge of senility, to occur to embark on Cuba in the midst of a revolution? At that time Steven was agreed that involuntarily when Mexico itself was involved in a revolution, his grandfather had been one of the few large landowners who had refused to contribute. No, his grandfather was not afraid of anything and, once he decides something, it would stop at nothing. It is possible that the two are much closer to what both admitted! Both were stubborn with some stubborn and proud lot.

Steven made an effort of will to erase from his mind the image that he had just traversed. Ginny, a witch of turbulent eyes, back

straight, chin defiantly opposing his temper and his calculatedly hurtful attacks. Cursed be their pride and their ability to recover! And its irreducible sincerity against the dishonesty of it!

"The way to concentrate and be aware of this map as the palm of the hand. Or are you thinking of something else?

Steven raised his head at the map Paco and drove across the table with a grunt.

"Yes. And he is waiting above.

- I do not understand how he manages! I wish I had your luck ... that kind of luck, I mean! What a coincidence to have met here with his former girlfriend, eh? And she recently widowed and others. I suppose it has forgiven him for having been jilted ...

"All the blame was cast Ginny snarled Steven.

Whether or not waiting Ana, Paco Steven Morgan noted that he took his time to meet with her. Paco also wondered as she had done many times-how women bore the thoughtless treatment that Steven gave them. The only one who had not tolerated, and so he had conquered, had been Ginny. There was a time when the couple Paco thought would work. Now I was not so sure. How Ginny would have taken the idea that Steven was going to Cuba, leaving her alone to return to Mexico? Much would have changed since he last saw her, not to be angry. Especially if Anna knew about Paco, who had had occasion to see Ginny angry, could not repress a shudder as he remembered the knife fight he had with Conception. Jesus! What a day that was!

- Thinking about something funny? "Steven said with a nasty tone. Paco noticed that Steven was still frowning, looking at that moment the servant came in bringing some sources.

-No. I smile with pleasure because I am hungry and that gumbo or whatever smells good.

What the hell was that worried both Steven? He had ordered dinner and now, suddenly threw back his chair and left the dish untouched.

- Do you mind, my friend, leave him alone dedicated to the solemn

task of killing the hungry? I prefer to go take a bath before turning to meet me ... appetite. Then we see.

No offense, Paco shrugged with equanimity.

"Okay. I can not wait to know how Jim is going to settle to avoid the duel without us. It's enough to hurt the feelings of a man, do not you think? Her eyes sparkled to snarl. How I would have liked to see the face of the senator at the time of being taken to jail!

With great tact, Paco had avoided bringing up the name of Brandon who was Sonya who had created all this mess and as he knew, had once been the mistress of Steven. Steven had not mentioned nor was any reference made to their participation in the matter. But Steven had always tended to be secretive. All this did not prevent Paco continue thinking about it, even after Steve left the room. What had brought Sonya to make an appointment with a dissolute man of bad reputation, that since the war she had lived many years according to conventional rules? And in the face of her husband! Or the woman was stupid or had been used to put the husband out of the game. Bishop and would have thought, no doubt, in looking at things from that angle.

Ginny-concentrated effort to think about anything other than the gulf that had opened between Steven and she had begun to think so. There was something strange and too many coincidences in this whole sordid affair. Why would a man like Andre Delery-young, undeniably handsome and attractive, had suddenly decided to woo a woman much older than himself, married for convenience? Delery had no qualms in showing that it was she who wanted it. It was presumption on your part to assume that was true, because she had too many affairs with men and Delery not to notice. And suddenly he had turned his attentions to Sonya. Why? And why instead of taking time had accelerated things like that? As for how it had accepted Sonya?

His father had not returned home and, despite the terrible

headache that had given him, Ginny decided to Sonya's room to follow her coaxing. Never mind that stepmother continue in a state of prostration. He had to face reality and be convinced that hysteria does not help at all. Although it seems ironic, it was possible that could help one another.

- Course she had arranged to meet him! How can you think that about me?

Sonya, his face and swollen eyes and skin full of bumps, looked deplorable, but Ginny kept insisting no merciless interrogation.

"I'm not saying that. But do not you realize you have to give a version that makes sense? Everything you've done so far is mourn

...

Sobbed again, Sonya reproachfully said:

- Oh, how insensitive you are! But you have never taken much pains to respect the conventions or the feelings of others ...

"In this case it is irrelevant what I've done," said Ginny, trying to control her voice and I'm trying to help. Leave to continue going round and tell me exactly what happened. Perhaps they will be able to help ... If only trying to reason with my father when he returns.

It took some time to get Ginny sobbing and tears, Sonya was completing the story, as I was ready at all times to blame what happened to it Ginny. However, in the end, the youngest of the women became convinced of the truth. Sonya was so do what he had done! Enjoy a surreptitious flirtation, without recognizing it and unprepared to face the consequences. But it was the role of Sonya, the biggest concern among the chain of events. Andre was the role of Delery which did not fit into the puzzle.

Why on earth had forced Steven to get involved in a discussion before having had time to set out your suspicions? Why had started again when they were trying to fight other people's affairs? Given the treacherous suddenly felt pain, Ginny closed her eyes. Yes, like Sonya, I wanted to give vent to tears, afford to mourn ... Have liked to throw things into the air, kicking the walls that

surrounded her, yelling strong. But of course, would do nothing about it. As he had promised Steven him away from his life and he would act like a polite stranger. He had already survived without him and would again. Nobody, nobody would ever know your pain and, after a while, the pain would disappear and she would be finally free.

"Think about it," he said and unconsciously straightened his back. "Yes, think how wonderful it will again be dependent not only of yourself and how to handle them alone. From now on you will live your own life. "And after launching this challenge not be allowed to recall what had been those harrowing months in Europe, surrounded by attentive suitors did not care at all ... No, not even Michel, her former boyfriend. After a while, when the twins were a little older, take them with her to Europe. Back even to Russia, where the tsar was probably his real father. No regrets this time. Steven and forget to help him forget it.

Taken these resolutions, Ginny thought again about the matter at hand. The duel, of course. "His father, Senator, fighting a duel? Somehow it still seemed unbelievable. William Brandon was not the sort of man, although in this case it seems that he had no alternative. Would that I had anticipated Delery Andre? If so why, dear God?

"I should ask myself," Ginny muttered, taking off the forks and letting her hair fall down her back. "By his side I know if what I suspect is true or not ... Like most men, he must believe that a woman can have a brain. "

In the mirror his face was pale and hard, the eyes two green stones. Ginny made a face and, taking the silver brush, I went through the locks rebels. The surprising implications of his own thoughts arm movement stopped halfway. Why not? Yes, why not? He knew very well take care. Their experience had taught him to disentangle well. " It would be a challenge. And above all, would not it Steven. Yes, and the ubiquitous Mr. Bishop, who also had not forgotten.

Chapter 10

So confident was Andre Delery, after his morning meeting with Mrs. Brandon and her husband had taken to visiting different places usually frequented in the city, had spent some time with his old friend and mentor Pepe Llulla and ordered new clothes to his tailor. After he had enjoyed a very pleasant time in a house for other discrete, with his new mistress who was none other than the sister of a close friend, married to another good friend. He had always been a devoted fan of Berthe, but she said she knew the boy raids than any other woman through her brother had proved elusive until she learned that her husband had a mulatto mistress. Berthe longed-and so I told Andre-learn how to excite a man to take him to the brink of insanity. Andre was more than willing to teach and, incidentally, enjoyed happy Berthe lush body. Meet again ...

With a sigh, when Andre looked at his watch with gold chain and realized it was a little late. He thought it was better to return to his home, was given a bathroom break and change clothes. I had to meet with Senator Brandon ninnies exactly five minutes before midnight ... He always liked to choose that time for duels in which he was challenged. At midnight it would be over and fortune would be greatly increased by the money-discreetly-placed in your bank account. His thin lips stretched into icy smile. What easier way to make a fortune for a man who preferred to live at leisure to devote his life to sacrifice themselves in a profession!

As he climbed the stairs, Andre was Delery night programming. Dinner with friends, Lucian Valette included. Theater where you would make a cameo and leave the alibi proven. And, after the duel, surely visit your favorite gaming house, run by an old acquaintance. That night he was a lucky man, the trump cards it would touch him!

"Sir ...

Her footman, Jean-Baptiste, was French and spoke no other language. Master and servant got on well after six years together.

"There was concern in the face of the dark-haired French alambriño? Certainly was not by mourning ... That would be too! Pausing a moment to remove his coat well adjusted, inquisitive Delery raised an eyebrow.

- Yes?

The servant coughed annoying.

"There ... what happens is that ... The truth is I do not know what to do. You told me not to wait any visit but ... the young lady is extremely attractive, sir. And also speaks French. Said ...

"No matter ... I'll say to myself what I have told you. So it is incredibly attractive? As you who says Baptiste, is a compliment. Are you waiting in the parlor?

"Yes, sir. I took the liberty of offering a glass of sherry. I also told him it was possible that you came very late, but said he would wait.

- He said that?

Delery's mouth cringed slightly as he thought if the visit would give him a hard time, boredom or a pleasant surprise. Women! Always full of little traps. He knew that few would dare to visit a man in his own house in broad daylight, unless the lady is not exactly a "lady." After taking off his coat, took off his vest also reaching the impenetrable footman with intent to give-and-give her time. After all, these were their apartments and had a right to get comfortable and if she was interested, maybe I convinced her that should also get comfortable. Neither could they forget that within hours he had to kill a man.

A little worried, Delery Andre hesitated a moment before ordering Jean-Baptiste to prepare the tub is larger and would ensure that double set of towels and scented soaps.

"If he stays, Mrs. share the bathroom with me.

Jean-Baptiste nodded and gave his master a glass of chilled white wine to give you energy. Not because I needed it. Mr. Delery was always in shape to meet a lady. He, Jean-Baptiste, had been making love to three, one after another, on a warm summer

evening. He saw Andre Delery across the small lobby with its elegant air of a swordsman, to open the door to the sitting room and enter it.

The wait was almost unbearable, but listening to the voices coming from the other side, had time to prepare before he came along. Ginny had not been set. The chairs were too small to support their crinoline evening gown and also was very nervous now that he was there.

Despite what you might feel on the inside, no sign of upheaval in the ways of Ginny when away from the portrait that had been studying carefully, when the door opened.

- Mr. Delery, do not greet me kindly previously announced!
He spoke coldly and formally, while extending her gloved hand. Delery was that he could not conceal his surprise at seeing her there. Just for a moment, then deftly good player, his eyes narrowed.

- Madam, I can hardly believe my luck!

The two were speaking in French. He kissed her hand, holding it in hers as she said with a trace of mockery:

- How could I imagine that you could come? I do not even have dared to dream.

As he talked, he wondered if at that point, she would seek to be the elusive or display annoying. It was a truly seductive woman, a fiery-haired gypsy with a mouth full of passion and desire.

Ginny, guessing his game, did nothing to free herself but imperceptibly he resisted when he tried to bring it closer to him.

"Mr. Delery, I came to talk about ... well, my stepmother. As you must have guessed we have not been too well lately, but I can see it in that state. Tell me, deliberately made his voice trembled a little, is this really true? Is it true that you had a date with her and they met by chance? Poor Sonya said, swore, so ... And I promised to do everything possible to convince my father about it before you two evil men, come to that stupid duel. And of course, who could

tell me the truth better than yourself? And you will say to me is not it? From the first moment I knew I could trust completely in his sincerity to the risk of sounding rude, because ... because I really do not care too much, as to try ... Is not it? I mean ...

Although he had narrowed his eyes at her speculatively, his voice was naughty

"And I, my fair lady, can I expect my absolute sincerity instead of you? Is that all you came here to do?

"Well ..." deliberately left the word hanging and she laughed nervously. Well, naturally I must be honest. I always am, unless they discover that others are not. I came for you, I guess that's pretty obvious is not it? But so is that I want to hear about Sonya. It has always been so fastidious, so formal ... Always criticizing me for jumping on convention ... And what happened today seems impossible ... And also about the duel. My father is so stubborn! He bound him both hands, saying quietly:

- Come on, lady, do not disappoint me! He came here in search of honesty and I have the impression that it is his nature not talk much or as fast as it is doing now. Would you mind give me to answer your first question? Well, in that case, giving his silence for approval, he pressed a little more hands. As a gentleman I am, I can only say that I was able to make love to his lovely stepmother. Unfortunately we were interrupted by my friends who had decided to picnic there. As for the meeting itself ... well ... Who knows? I had asked that we were in the bluffs of the river without her accept or refuse. When I'm a patient man y. .. I waited y. .. behold, by chance, he said, appeared Sonya. Be nothing more natural than talking ... It was a shame, really, as his father appeared amiss ...

"But I suppose if my father had not appeared, his friends had been in charge of spreading gossip and, ultimately, he had been obliged to fight anyway, is not it?

With an air of innocence, Ginny opened her eyes wide and, realizing that he looked very thoughtful, he gave one of his most captivating smile.

"I'm going to cheat now, Mr. Delery. I is not stupid but sometimes talk too much and too fast. And so this time I think is why Sonya? It is older than you and is married to ... my father. Y. ..

"Do not go. He continued pressing her hands tightly and her smile fell short of Ginny. You intrigue me. And, if anything, more now than before. More than when he appeared at the opera without her husband and allowed me to accompany her to her box. Did you bother to devote my attentions to her stepmother instead of you?

- Oh, no! I thought he wanted to be polite, nothing more. If I wanted to draw your attention, I guess I'd have managed to get it. But back to my father, and Sonya, of course, my question is if your friends actually occurred by chance, when they did. Or if there is any special reason why you want my father would challenge him to a duel ...

This time he laughed, throwing her head back, but Ginny realized that laughter was no more than the lips and the eyes were fixed on her.

"You have a great imagination, lady, that looks good and its other attractions. And you still intriguing. Did you come with the intention of offering ... ahem ... some kind of satisfaction that I beat your father?

- Money! "Said Ginny sharp and brutal, leaving a smile. More certainly than that because you are to kill him. And I hope that you measure carefully the consequences of what they intend to do, if it succeeds with its plan, which I doubt. My father has friends, so to speak, who watch over him. Something could happen to you ... an accident, perhaps. Had not you think?

"What I'm thinking is that you are, you came here to challenge me ... His words are as poisonous as his wit. I pay my tribute to you, ma'am! However, "slowly lowered his voice no doubt you will understand that this is a matter of honor and that is his father who has challenged me me and not vice versa! Therefore I have no choice possible ...

"There's always err honorable exit the kill.

- Oh, so he could kill me!

"If I told you that was wrong to think that Sonya and you ...

"I fear that surprised us in a situation too compromised.

Ginny realized that she was playing with it and was furious.

"Mr. Delery, I have offered ...

"Yes, but you knew he would not accept it? You see, in my own way I too am being honest. What would have happened if I had intended to agree to your request in return you gave me?

"Well, from the time he was gentleman enough not to do so, the question is more, do not you think?

Her green eyes narrowed clashed with Andre as equals. It was the kind of woman who did not flee the look y. .. What man could resist? Delery was tempted to hold it. After all had come on their own and were unlikely to dare to tell anyone where he had been. Or dare?

"I'd better go now. I've already bothered for some time.

He tore his hands from his, that gave much to his regret.

"I hope I have done too unhappy ... Y. .. Who knows? Nobody is perfect, could miss the blow ...

-O does not appear ...

He had no choice but to admire his chutzpah. It truly was a grown woman, and now more than ever, I wanted ... By hook or by crook ... get it off him. It was for good, would take him.

"If it's a warning, I appreciate your concern. 'm Hoping our next meeting.

"Me too" said Ginny without any inflection.

"Neither lost nor won." Was not this the result? Although Delery Andre had not denied any of his accusations, Ginny had the unpleasant impression that it was he who had carried off the palm. Above all, have managed to continue being a gentleman to the end. Still she thought she had to do something, perhaps as much for herself as Sonya and the senator. It seemed unthinkable to stay in his room, pacing within the four walls, biting his own

frustration. I also thought of Steven's reaction if she had managed to avoid the duel.

"I must not waste time thinking about their reactions, thought Ginny stubbornly. "In the end, it was over between us."

He felt a sudden anguish that made him jump the tears as she convinced herself that she was crying for lost time. How had not noticed that two people as different and as stubborn as they were Steven and she could never have lead normal lives carrying other marriages? The only link between them was carnal love. Were not understood or knew what they were mutual trust and fellowship.

"Ah, he thought. "Why do I have to return again and again about the same? This time I will start a new life that is truly consistent with my feelings. No matter, I has to import, she'll do, provided it does not interfere in my life. "

Imagine his surprise to find none other than Mr. Bishop himself who, coincidentally, was passing by in a dilapidated rental car at the time she left her snubbed interview with Mr. Delery.

"It is very proper that a young lady, married and attractive, is walking alone through the streets of New Orleans," he said sternly. No, ma'am, can not be. I insist on taking her wherever you go. And I must stress that does not interfere in the matter of the duel between his father and Mr. Delery. You can be sure that the match is not going to make ... I still have some influence in certain circles. And now ... talking about the preparations for his return to Mexico ...

Without giving him time to protest, his voice remained dry and without inflection, one to one demolishing their arguments with logical reasons. Do not want to see their children before they forgotten? Had not heard that Francisco had to travel urgently to Cuba and that Renaldo had been called to take over the farm? The new wife he was very young and would feel very lonely without the company of another woman of her age.

Ginny sank into silence, hiding her feelings under a mask of cool indifference. No, you would like to ask how the Steven fit in their

current plans, which were they were. What Steven did, and cared nothing, had not been that clear?

Chapter 11

Despite the rumors, despite the scandal, had to hold her head high and face the people as if nothing had happened. That was the only way to act so that, for them to run much gossip, no one could be certain that they were true. Had to speak and smile as if nothing had happened, and not to cancel any commitment.

As the afternoon went by, more and more astonished Sonya Ginny. He had expected to find up and active, after leaving it, before leaving for the city in a state that seemed conducive to staying in bed with a towel on his head. But there it was again in the box at the opera with the senator, feeling like all eyes were fixed on them. Sonya How could bear it? Despite the little sympathy that lately felt by his stepmother, Ginny could not help admiring the serenity and courage of this woman, able to smile and nods to the friends who greeted. And meanwhile, talking animatedly to her husband as though there were, nor never have happened, nothing between them.

"Why should we all be so hypocritical, if at this time should not be anyone on stage who does not know what happened?" Ginny had been shocked to learn that plans for the evening had been canceled and that as expected, go to the opera and later attended the dance as usual. "What good is so hard to keep up appearances when, basically, everything is falling apart?" And I think also in relation to Steven and her. He was not strong enough to confront him, he needed time to compose herself.

To his surprise, for the first time in his life, Senator Brandon had cut his vehement protests dry, his voice strong and compelling: -Virginia, for once in your life, you do exactly what I say, you or disagree. Southerners have some unwritten code of conduct ... tag if you want to call it. But do not bring to light our dirty linen in public. Neither have any consideration to what we feel each other.

The senator looks Sonya pierced like a sword, making her blush until the pallor of his face had disappeared. But the senator was not finished:

"There is no need for anyone else to know about our affairs. Given the world we present a united front. Is that clear?

- Did you say to Steven? Ginny asked with rebellion. Not the kind of man who easily conform to codes of honor to others! He always does what he wants! I'm sure you have decided to forget that we go out tonight.

"Your husband will be there. I do not care fights among you. I trust them to behave with decorum and dignity.

With dignity! ... Always the famous dignity ... Ginny thought back straightening. Where was Steven while she was sitting here alone, providing the perfect image of the slighted wife? No, not stand it another minute. Although his father were going to fight that night, he would not stay there pretending to all those people, that nothing had happened here. He would leave at intermission.

In fact, Ginny got up to leave just the lights. But at that moment the door opened the box, leaving Ginny nailed into place. Steven Seeing his eyes began to flash dangerously. Decorum and dignity! ... If he could not keep, why would I do it? If he denied the divorce because it would be well to persuade him to give it to her somehow. It would be so rude and unpleasant as possible. For once he was going to have to swallow!

Sonya and the senator had turned around. Steven, still no progress to keep the door open, he presented his usual polite excuses.

"Sorry about being late, but there was an overturned car a few blocks from here and we had to make a detour to reach. I have the pleasure to introduce Mrs. Dos Santos, and his father, Mr. Ignacio dos Santos. They come from Cuba, but the lady I've known since childhood ...

While Steven was the necessary introductions, Ginny felt his head spinning and ideas, leaving her confused him speechless.

Mechanically, Ginny bowed, greeting newcomers, a smug smile

and Ana, a gift her father Ignacio-tall and lean. Ginny kept a frozen smile on his lips while Steven, very politely, arrange the provision of chairs, taking care to stay seated between her and Anna Ignacio went to sit in front, next to Sonya. The bastard was sure she would not make a scene not to get into the ridiculous role of the deceived wife. With resentment, Ginny thought he would not give that satisfaction. He would show that she could be a hypocrite and play a role as well as he. Somehow manage to put in their place and show them that she was not the dumbest.

With fake smile and graceful, Ginny leaned ignoring Steven and started a casual conversation with Ana that surprised and cautious, I felt the tension Steven arm below it.

"I am sorry we have not really had occasion to talk about the past. It's inexcusable that Steven has not brought before any of those tedious meetings that have so often since we arrived. But tell me what has become of his life since the last time we met ... Her husband ...

Dona Ana, tight lips and downcast eyes, said in a sweet voice "Unfortunately, madam, my husband tragically died the year before we were married. I am a widow sighed bitterly watching Steven and continued quietly: "I had to get away, so many memories! ... The plantation is very great, as you know, and it takes the energy of a man to handle ... My father, always loving, insisted that he could handle his foreman with the help of a cousin. That's why we come. New Orleans has always been one of my favorite cities. I remember having visited many times as a child and my husband brought me to spend the honeymoon here ... What turned out to be a good actress, thought Ginny angrily, seeing that she let his words were diluted in suggestive silence. As if he had been waiting for an opportunity, Steven attended:
- Why not change the subject? Ana has come here to distract their sentences.

"Traitor, but traitor," yelled Ginny had wanted him ... and scratch his face ... Instead he straightened in his chair, shrugging his

shoulders to show indifference.

"Yeah, sure. Why you do not choose it this time? I say this because if you think we have to prove to all those people who has turned his glasses at us, we're delighted.

Ana took a little air and leaned imperceptibly into Steven turned his head with a smile belied by the hardness of the gaze of his blue eyes.

"You've always been a consummate actress, dear, do not you do a little better tonight? "Between teeth and much lower voice and sharply said:" Did you ever thought of anything better than being stupid enough to visit in your home to your last lover in broad daylight, for everyone out? I warned you to be discreet.

It was fortunate, thought Ginny, amid anger that the lighting, the lights were turning off announcing the initiation of the second act. He dropped the mask of his smile and, turning, confronted him with eyes that gleamed with contempt.

- Warned, tell me? The warnings are for those who fear them, Mr. Morgan! "I blurted out the" sir "like a dart, without raising his voice. As to discretion, allow me to inform you that I see my lovers so openly and frequently as you do with yours. Is it clear, no? I could feel the anger in his blue eyes with the same physical sensation that he could see how dilated the nostrils, how stretched her lips into a snarl of rage and how her whole body tense ... the same as a cat about to pounce. Oh God, how well he knew! Too well sometimes!

"What is very clear, ma'am, is that you tend to push the limits. I will not allow my wife to behave like a slut! Do you understand? Tonight we're going to keep up appearances before the New Orleans society. And start packing tomorrow to leave for Mexico! If you continue to neglect your children, you take them off for not knowing a mother!

She felt that those cruel words, uttered with malice aforethought, he dug into the depths of his mind empty. I could not believe what he heard. That could not be the Steven whom she had loved

passionately, beyond the human and the divine could not be the Steven by those who had suffered so much. Whatever their differences, and the damage had been done to each other, was not worthy of such a threat, unfair and unconscionable.

She felt her breathing quickened and her heart burst in his chest as if she were drowning in ice water. Being able to say what he had said and what is worse, in front of Anne to highlight that he wanted to pack his recalcitrant wife back to Mexico to get rid of it and be free! It was unbearable!

Ginny gasped in pain as he felt that he squeezed his wrist with such force that mourn would have made had he not been paralyzed by anxiety and surprise.

- None of scenes, please! Or you are failing self-preservation?

Damn it, Ginny, it's time to grow up! He longed to be a mother ...

Why not try to be all at once?

- Let me go, Steven! Do you enjoy violent? No, I will not make any scenes. I think ... already said all I had to say between us. Do not you think?

Believe it or not, was his own voice that Ginny listened. A voice that seemed to come from far away through space. A voice without inflection and barely audible as the rustle of dry straw. After a long silence he went deeper and deeper into it, despite the music and singing that filled the theater. He released her hand and she leaned back in his chair. He also sat up, put back his attention to Ana that whispered something, putting his hand with the possessive gesture on his arm.

"I will not do a scene. Not even worth it and I will not give the satisfaction of being master of the field again. All is over between us and it is better to say nothing. So what now? Who cares anything about anything? "

These same words, repeated again and again, had scars on his soul a long time, so recites, walking with bare legs and bare feet behind a wagon. Long ago ... She had changed much since then! Much had changed everything! Now nothing mattered ... All disappear ...

Also to the feelings and pain ...

"You're too hard on your wife. Have I escaped me that I try it? I think I'm a little scared," she said Anna, looking askance at the man beside her.

Ana caught the flash of the eyes of Steven despite the smile that lead and seeing her, saying she was afraid it would have been only half a lie.

"That will not leak or small, depend on what you do. What do you think?

Anna caught her breath, wondering why the man both excited to the point of wanting to be closer to him ... Oh, yes, closer! He felt the heat down her body, melting to the bone when he touched her.

"I think ... I think either we were then prepared. I was a rude girl right? And I had no idea what marriage meant. I had much to learn!

- And now you think you learned?

He said scathingly, watching nervously wetting his lips.

I replied modestly:

"Oh, I'm still learning ... I find it very interesting having a good teacher.

Doña Ana had a good collection of teachers, after their short married life ... Including his father, jealous man and very generous. Naturally I had no intention to let him know Steven. Nor thought he had decided to tell him hooked when he heard by chance that his former boyfriend was in New Orleans. So Don Ignacio had persuaded to postpone indefinitely the return to Cuba to engage in fulfilling its plan to conquer the interest of Steven. The fact that Steven was married, had no relevance to what Anna had in mind only because it provided the exquisite pleasure of exhibiting his triumph viciously at the woman who once had treated with such contempt by marrying her boyfriend their noses. No, never had forgiven him. He enjoyed his revenge and would continue to enjoy, once Steven's wife was away and stop being a nuisance. He had managed to interest the talk about going to Cuba with her. Which

would give Ana a great pleasure!

If all be over soon! Despite the deafening music, Ginny was perfectly aware of their presence. Steven and that whore Anna, their heads close together, stuck shoulders, whispering among themselves and leaving her completely isolated. It mattered not that much ... All I wanted was to be away. Gone were the passion and fury without leaving nothing but a vast emptiness.

Steve enjoyed with Ana Ana and Steven enjoyed all the time who was able to keep! But that night was over for good!

He behaved with great composure during intermission. He stood leaning Ignacio, crimp the old hawk in a casual conversation, however, kept the attention of Mr. Dos Santos fixed on her, and her magnificent breasts very daring discovered under the neckline of her gown. At one point, Ignacio left the stage with the senator to bring something fresh to the ladies. Champagne drink drinks!

Served in crystal goblets carved so fine that it seemed they were going to undo fingers. After he managed to accommodate the chairs so you get sitting on the other side of Ginny.

Ah, yes! It was still very good for wooing! It could also turn his back on acting as if Steven was not there. Ginny, spurred by the champagne, sparkling and mischievous as shown Ignacio discovered with pleasure.

- Champagne in crystal glasses! How he managed to get it? I love the champagne but put me look a bit tipsy and silly!

- It is very far from looking like a fool! I think it's the most intelligent women I have met. His talent combined with her beauty, it remains a very dangerous combination ... If he allows an old saying certain things ...

- You are not in any way an old, Ignacio! I'm sure I'm not the first woman to say so ...! I've always felt comfortable next to older men

...

Don Ignacio, who had imagined the wife of Steven as a typical

American woman aggressive, petulant, and incapable of sustaining a conversation, I was pleasantly surprised. What he could not understand is that the husband was unaware of such a woman to engage in small-Anne who, apart from its beauty, had little to offer. Although they had been dating, how could the man who called himself Mexico Esteban Alvarado, Ana was courting his own wife before? Unless he were punished for some slip, paying with its own currency.

Don Ignacio belied his thoughts through his deep eyes or their rather harsh features. It was an energetic man, founder of a sugar empire that was willing to defend at any cost, used to impose their will. If he intended to conquer Mrs. Morgan-woman-obviously unhappy he would get without the slightest doubt. As for Ana .. He could not help a sigh of impatience. He himself had chosen for his wife Anne and son Alonso, rebellious and reckless boy. She was a virgin, very handsome and excellent rider, indispensable condition imposed by Alonso for a woman to be worthy of her hand. But Alonso's audacity is not tempered by marriage and had died in a riding accident, leaving the beautiful widow Anne, in need of protection.

Don Ignacio mourned the death of his son who had been a favorite of the mother. But he had two older sons, fortunately still alive, to ensure the name and family inheritance. Alonso has always been a troubled boy and undisciplined. God took away and placed.

Sometimes life was hard but you had to go on living ...

Don Ignacio had dedicated their more expensive efforts to console the girl-widow, to his surprise, had been exceptionally accommodating in bed. He felt no guilt complex for their behavior. She had met him when he was already half way and felt responsible for the girl. When he started to get bored, I allowed to take other lovers, all chosen by him without her knowledge. And he had brought in his business trip to New Orleans to find a husband. Had she found at last? A divorce was not disposable and should be recalled that Don Francisco Alvarado Ana had chosen as

a bride of his grandson and heir. Everything was possible ... When Ginny had emptied her second glass of champagne with Ignacio diligently refilled, decided to enjoy the evening because it was assumed that was what was expected of her. It also decided that Steven hated and despised and, in some ways, Ignacio liked that clearly appreciated.

The fact that the father of Anna seemed very engaged in conversation with Ginny, had not gone unnoticed by Steven wondering how it was that, seeing Ginny openly flirting with another man, could still prone to violence. Is it that there was nothing-neither prayers nor threats, that might subdue the indomitable defiance of his wife? Ginny was frustrated and irritated and from the first moment I came across in his life. Should I always drink the cup of bitterness?

There was a moment when all rose to leave the theater and he brushed shoulders to help Ginny gently into her coat, "that Steven wanted to delay their hands on these cold shoulders to feel, if only once more, the smoothness your skin on the fingers. It would have been a weakness ... Ginny was his weakness! ... From the moment that blinded him, causing him to lose the logic of the old and cold pragmatism that until then had ruled his life. He felt it away from him and then offered his arm to Anna, damn Ginny had to teach him a lesson! This time would not loosen ...

They six were part of the crowd that was leaving the opera, pausing at the door to recognize their carriages, in the turmoil of cars littered the street.

Sen. Brandon took a quick glance at your watch before placing it back inside his jacket pocket. Gesture that would have passed unnoticed at any other time. Sonya Ginny blanched and shuddered slightly, resulting in Ignacio to say thoughtfully in his ear:

- Are you cold? In my car there is a fur coat ...

She answered mechanically words that would later be unable to remember. How to explain the fulfilled and the shudder gentleman concerned was not caused by the breeze outside but something that

came from deep within? That would be around midnight. The senator seemed impatient. In the faction against the lamplight brought out the deep lines that betrayed his age. Was he afraid? What he meant with Mr. Bishop that the duel would take place?

- Look, there's our car!

It was Ana who discovered it. It added that after speaking to Steven:

"Well, we had dinner together?"

Going down the stairs, Ginny dropped her shawl and Ignacio gently picked it up. Then, still dazed, thought that this gesture had saved his life. At that time only felt a sudden flash of an explosion followed. An air rifle flew past his face.

Someone shouted, and that cry broke the state of paralysis that everyone had fallen for a second, starting a real pandemonium as the echo of the din reverberated everywhere. The horses snorted and growled, and men and sweat and frightened, struggling to contain them to prevent run over to the panicking crowd to disperse in all directions terrified, hastily down the stairs of the opera while those already in Street, seeking refuge in doorways and nooks. The uproar was increasing.

- It's a riot!

- They are throwing at us!

- Damn reconstructionists!

Paralyzed by fear, Ginny was standing still without understanding what was happening when he felt a push Steven made her bend her knees.

- For Christ! "Have you lost consciousness? Want to get killed too? Kill? Who was killed? He felt a protective arm covering her ears to reduce the noise was deafening and continued to grow until she screams also:

- No! No, no, no!

Why was hysterical Sonya again?

Ginny tried to get up even though the crowd seemed increasingly tightened around her, but Ignacio, still kneeling beside him, held it

firmly while it could see that his arm was shaking.

- No, ma'am, please do not look!

In her agitation was speaking in Spanish.

- God! It was addressed to me ... If I had not bent at that moment

...

- Who ...?

He began to ask Ignacio, trying to wiggle out of his hands, but was a stranger in the crowd who replied:

- God! Sen. Brandon has been murdered!

Chapter 12

Ginny kept moving like a robot, his senses dulled quite happily, walking like a statue. It seemed back to those confusing days when she was married to Ivan and the princess was Sahrkanov, protected from the contingencies of life in a cloud of opium. Almost like a challenge, responded promptly to the doctor who administered a drink to make her sleep, she knew contained laudanum. For once would not hurt. There were too many things that do not want to think.

I had heard Dr. Maddox that his father was not dead but seriously injured and needed intensive care. That, even to save his life, it was feared he could not walk again. Had dealt with her stepmother, almost lost the senses by the shock and remorse, took a double dose of the drink's doctor so he could sleep. He had heard the babbling explanations of Don Ignacio was a man with many enemies in Cuba because of his sympathies for the revolutionaries. How strange that so handsome gentleman was a revolutionary!

-Entiéndalo, please. I own important sugar plantations scattered throughout the country. Two of them, run by my two sons are in provinces that have been occupied by rebels. So ... naturally ...

His expressive gesture of raising the palms facing up, made it unnecessary to explain. Ignacio was a practical man who always adopt any policy that would be useful. For the same reason there

were many interested in out of the way as a warning to others who felt the same. Mr. Dos Santos was convinced that the bullet was meant for him.

"It would be the first time. I tried it once or twice in Cuba and that is one reason why I'm in New Orleans instead of being in Florida, where the fights between the two factions are continuous. If it were not for her shawl ... But how I regret that his father had been right behind us! Never would have endangered anyone's life because of me!

"You could not guess, of course. My father will recover, I'm sure. It is a strong and healthy man. Did not hear the doctor say?

Oh, yes! He had done everything he should do. He had for each appropriate response. Less for Steven. Steven least that, after depositing his precious Ana somewhere, had gone to fetch stride, picking, almost beside the bed of Sonya.

"I tell you, Ginny.

His voice sounded cold and distant and she could not guess the look in his eyes in the darkened hall. He thought he wanted to see her face.

"I have nothing to say. You've made it pretty clear things between us.

Try to unhook the arm holding her fingers tightly, holding it before him like a criminal caught in the act of escaping.

Ginny could tell the effort was costing him control his voice and speak even lower, noting, as he too would have noticed, the light ray like the blade of a sword coming out the open door of the room Sonya. The sword hung between them, leaving it without moving.

"Ginny ... Damn! You may have been you!

- Would it have been me? I would have made things easier is not it?

He released her arm and she saw the look of indignation that he was throwing.

"No, not so. Been for other drawback because I would have to postpone my trip to Cuba. And for the same reason I do not want

to see you exposed to any risk. Mr. Dos Santos, whose company resultarte seems so pleasant, is a man too dangerous to have him around, dear.

He was glad forced him to drop his mask of false concern. End at once!, Said his mind exhausted. End once before it changes the mood and take you in his arms!

"You're so ... Since I met you not too long ago, right? And if that's all you had to say, give the matter over. You can rest assured I will pack my bags and I'll be ready to leave for Mexico as soon as possible. Even you must acknowledge that it is possible that part at this time as was my desire. Once you know what condition it is my father ...

"Stay with your father and kept his composure, if you can. I'll fix your game and make sure you an escort. A demain ...

He turned on his heels with this surly "until tomorrow" and began to walk away without doubt anxious to meet Ana As Ginny confessed later, was an incipient hysteria that made her cling to his arm and say in a voice as sharp as nails that drove:

- What do you mean? What are you going to fix? I do not want to fix anything, you know? I can handle myself, thank you. Bastard! As I have learned could have ...

He was sorry but was too late. Despite the low yellow light that illuminated, he saw her dark blue eyes flashed when, turning to face her, he plunged his fingers into the arm to immobilize it.

- Could I what? What the hell is what you're trying to say? Once and for all, Ginny, you need to take a lesson. Several in fact! But before you give me an explanation ...

Through the open door of the room came a few moans Sonya were becoming cries of remorse and self pity.

- I never thought could happen! How was I to suspect that he wanted to kill him? God, God!

There was a murmur of voices that wanted soothing comfort and slammed the left in the dark. Blind with rage Ginny shook off his arm and headed to her own bedroom. It was hoped that he had the

decency to leave her alone that night. It would certainly anxious to return to the expectant Ana

But while he fumbled for the doorknob in the dark, it was he who held her by the shoulders, leaving her trapped between her body and door. It was he who opened it and he who held her to keep her from falling when entering the room, pushing the door shut behind them.

- For the love of God, let me now! You need not overact. Surely the doctor and nurses will be impressed by the concern and devotion you show for me ... Like the impressionists before in Monterrey. Do not you remember, Steven? Then, as now, was beyond revenge ...

He lost his breath when he turned to look at his face, holding her wrists behind his back. , "And you, slut, what is your revenge? Are you?

He watched as he tore the bodice of her dress leaving her bare breasts and how, despite his protestations, he pressed his lips against her nipples pointed.

- Let me go, Steven! If someone is hypocritical, it's you! No. .. no ... Please, no! ...

- I am the hypocrite! "And then roared in Spanish:" Damn! Perhaps I do too! But we are in darkness and can not see the hatred in your eyes. It's like so many times that I remember, even if you have forgotten the since you've become a wife to stop being complacent and the passionate lover who can not forget. Each of his words were a dart that pierced the depths of Ginny's heart, making it waver between pain and anger. Yet he was right. Although the word continued to insult, his body began to surrender. And not just delivered ... Her sensuality had become aggressive and rubbed her hips against him ... inviting softness to hardness ... and lips feverishly opened the fierce kisses with which he attacked.

There was no light in the room, whose window blinds and curtains were completely closed. What happened between them could know only darkness, and only with a shudder would be remembered later. Like the tiger that escaped from a cage, so they stopped them from escaping the erotic wanderings that had never been set free, in a wave of violence and passion.

They looked like beasts tearing each other clothes and pounced on their bodies. He threw it on the carpeted floor. The thin string of sensuality that drove them to each other, leading them tightened to the point of madness. It was hours, not minutes.

Ginny ran her body until he was lying before him, legs spread in a sawing motion, allowing its strength and hardness to penetrate, drowning the protests, the words, thoughts ...

At least their bodies agreed to a truce but had words that could not retire, and questions and answers that could not be forgotten.

From the plush carpet that had been lying, he took her to bed for a while slipping to the floor again. It was a struggle in which there were no winners or losers, but struggle to finish. He did do everything, every whim that you were going on and she enjoyed doing it. That was how he triumphed over him, and finally falling inert and almost senseless, caught between his legs and arms of the man who held her captive.

All words of love, all the obscenities that he had whispered it had said in Spanish. She had done the same. It was like back in time and indulge in reveries inspired by them. Was not want so much as the love? You would? No matter, as something had ... But such thoughts were more a product of the waking dream mixed with reason and understanding.

When Ginny woke up in bed moist and revolt, the clothes strewn on the floor, Steven was gone ... With Ana! With Anne as she must have assumed, as it should have known! He had used and abused her, she had allowed although both had been a sort of farewell.

"It meant nothing ... nothing ..." The words sounded hollow in his brain but with a concentrated effort Ginny got rid of the bad

memories claiming they had never happened. It helped that Steven seemed to point of honor to stay out in the following days. And she closed her door unlocked. If you really would have liked, he would have shot down. But he did nothing, nothing at all. And she does not ...

By the way isolated, Ginny spent those days as if he were sleepwalking. Sometimes I thought really pregnant. The senator remained in a state of half unconsciousness, controlled by drugs. Dr. Maddox had warned that any movement or any attempt to get out of bed, could cause a dangerous shift of the bullet, lodged against the spine. Ginny was the most time spent at his side, unable to believe that waxy-faced man, old man lying between white linen sheets, could be the same vital and handsome for the ladies whose smile sighed when he I ran away. They tended the sick two nuns recommended by the doctor and Ginny appreciated the idea that allowed him to sleep at night. As for Sonya, she also needed attention because the fear and guilt had upset. If he was crying hysterically and screaming loudly that he wanted to let her die, seemed to go back in time, acting during these periods as if her first husband was still alive.

- Dear! We are all so sorry, so sorry ... If there is anything we can do ...

Ginny had been accustomed to dealing with the enormous amount of caring visitors, almost all old friends of Sonya. When asked about the status of your stepmother, replied evasively that he was under the influence of sedatives, he was deeply affected and the doctor had forbidden visitors. The only friend he had seen Sonya was Adeline Pruett entering and leaving the patient's room without bothering to be announced. But even the redoubtable lady was able to discover the real state of Sonya.

Pruett Adeline had started an authoritative voice say:

- But what nonsense is this? Why are you hiding? You should learn to behave instead of believing that by adopting this attitude you will avoid being engulfed in tongues. Where is your dignity, my

dear?

The good of the nun who sat beside the window, was caring for Sonya, she did not know what to do: whether to continue his duty or leave the room to call a family member. There was the nun from the beads nervously when suddenly, Sonya jumped in bed, recovering his appearance as a child, her hair loose over her shoulders and blue eyes were wide with fearful expression.

- Oh, Adeline, you! I'm shamed ... Do you think everybody knows? How could he do? Even if Yankee ... You might have thought of something better to brag to his mulatto lover ... And I believe I'm leaving ...

Mrs. Pruett, who prided himself on not afraid of anything, stammered:

Sonya ...

- Think you finally shoot? He deserves it! Are not deserve it, Adeline? Oh, my God, I must have been crazy, completely crazy for letting me playing everything for a man like that, knowing what it was! A fierce ... only a savage, like the Indians with whom he has lived ... Please tell me that nobody else knows ... I could not live if I knew that others suspect ...

Adeline recovered as he could and went to bed Sonya, clutching hands as he motioned to the nun's silly to ask for help to the doctor or the maid of the same Sonya.

- My dear, you need not worry about it! I'm the only one who knows and you can be sure that my mouth will not say one single word on the subject!

Over his shoulder, he told Sister Therese

"Go and look to Tillie, she will know what to do. And hurry, please!

Accustomed to blindly obey a voice in this case reminded him of his mother superior nun-black robe slipped running out of room. He thought he was doing his duty. It was evident that the two women knew each other well and, judging by the clothes and jewels they wore, the lady belonged to high society.

In his confusion, the poor nun left the door ajar and rushed down the hall to stumble violently with a tall man coming out of the room of Senator also, obviously embarrassed.

Steven Morgan swore no time to think who encountered. He was a devil of humor and just make the excuse of rigor. As usual his temper was directed to Ginny that since three days, he had managed to circumvent it. Damn! What kind of game was he was doing now? And where was she?

That's what he asked the terrified nun who, with his face scared rabbit, he had kept his mouth open and twisted turn.

"I apologize, my sister, but where is my wife?

The sister, forgetting laboriously learned English, French stammered:

Madame Brandon ... his friend asked me to ...

- Do you please tell my wife I want to see it immediately? And if it is hidden, you can tell that I intend to find it.

Steven, fuming over his eyes, entered the room hurriedly passing Sonya almost above the confused nun. Sonya received him shouting:

- You! How dare you enter my room after having been with ... with that garbage? What are you doing here? How could he escape?

All that Mrs. Pruett could do was raise his hands to heaven in despair. Of all the people who might have appeared in that moment had to be just him! ... At the time of his poor friend was obviously reliving the past ... For the first time in his life he was helpless, not knowing what to do.

- What the hell are you talking about?

Steven closed the door with a kick without ceremony, staring coldly at Sonya lying sprawled across, opening his eyes more and more as they approached. Tears began to fall out while babbling:

- How can you talk like that? I thought he loved me and was able to leave my bed for her ... Was it also needs to seduce her?

He froze, unable to understand what Mrs. Pruett wanted to say:

"It better go away. He has lost track of time and think we're still at

war at the time when you ...

- God, God ...

This time I said almost in a whisper, looking at Sonya. Sonya from whom he had not agreed a long time. She had come to see her as the wife of Brandon, Ginny's stepmother ... And now he was staring china-blue eyes and in them the same mixture of horror and nostalgia ... And Mrs. Pruett was in the midst of all this.

But Sony seemed to have forgotten that there was no one else present. He kept his eyes red with weeping, unable to believe that he had had the audacity to enter her room, while still under arrest. Would you expect her to give him shelter? An involuntary shudder ran through her body to him. Tall, stocky, now this body she knew so intimately, the depth of his blue eyes looking at her surroundings, the familiar flutter of his nostrils. "Oh, God!" He thought desperately, "why has so much power over me? Why I want so foolishly? "

The invective that Sonya was throwing left off in his throat and he used to mutter rudely:

"Look, Sonya, listen, will you? There's something I ...

But she did not want to hear his lies. It did not matter. All that mattered was that he was here and he wanted her. "I had not said a thousand times? "I want you, dear Sonya, that is sufficient for you?" Had to suffice if nothing else that she might expect. William was gone, and here he was, his fiery lover. Had he not said very wisely Adeline who enjoyed and have fun while you could?

Sonya had completely forgotten Pruett Adeline's presence in the room. All his interest, his dissatisfaction, his hatred and desire, were focused on him captain Steven Morgan, out of uniform, inconsiderate and ravishingly beautiful in its civil suit properly cut.

Steven was saying something but she interrupted him in tears.

- No, I do not want to hear anymore! Never mind! You hear me?

Why are you still standing there? Generally you are not so undecided ... You were so slow that stormy day when I did yours in

the force ... What stops you now? "I'm prettier than her? My skin is whiter ... Look!

- By God, Sonya, stop! I'm not here to rape her. Do you want to hear, for the love of God?

Steven made the mistake to grab the wrist when he saw that she tore her nightgown to uncover her breasts and Sonya used to cling to it as, with a rapidity that surprised him, he put his bare legs off the bed as if to rise.

Sonya, now ...

Mrs. Pruett began to speak firmly, ashamed of having been too interested in the scene for having interrupted earlier. But a younger voice and clearer, left where they were petrified, forming a truly unique table.

- How do you want to be created if one of your habits is to devote yourself to violate defenseless women? You can not deny, do you, Steven?

Later, Steven would reflect with bitterness that Ginny could not have chosen a worse time to manifest his presence. And the satisfaction he supposed would have provided the expression on all of them as heads turned to meet his fearless and slender figure standing at the door.

Dark spots on his face white as paper, highlighting the icy brilliance of emerald eyes, which seemed even more ragged than usual. Steven did not look at but Sonya was still clinging to him, asking again and again with the insistence of a spoiled child:

- Who is she? Is it another one of your women?

And Ginny felt sorry for Sonya ... By Sonya poor, forced to carry the weight of such a secret for so many years ...

No, Ginny decided, would not look at Steven who had not opened his mouth and did not say anything when she went with a familiar tone:

"No, not worth a farthing, and not worth pining for him, you know?

And if you want ... No, I'm one of their women ... I visit ... A visit

that is here on his return trip home ...

When she turned around and left the room, Steven did nothing to stop it. Even at that point ... Only he had understood why he was leaving Ginny that way and what was the message that held his last words. And since there was nothing he could do or say at that time without getting both ridiculous, let her go, knowing I could be forever ...

And also knowing at the time that remained the only woman who wanted only his, forever. The woman for whom life sigh.

Chapter 13

Without knowing how and almost unwittingly, here he was, on a schooner sailing on a calm sea. Only a slight breeze cooled her face flushed. The sun's rays were reflected in the greenish blue water, break into small miniature suns in every drop of foam that leaped through the air. He leaned on the burning boldly mahogany railing, enjoying the salty moisture that splattered his face and hair and closed her eyes in ecstasy. How would you feel one given to waters as slaughtered virgins of old? He had once read that drowning was an easy way to die, the easier and less painful since then to drown in tears. "But tears are not for me," he said resolutely, turning to open our eyes and closing them again, blinded by the brightness of the sky and sea. There was now no pirate in sight. This time would be truly free!

"I belong only to myself! I belong to myself for the rest of my life," he said proudly, lifting her chin as she had always done, with this gesture that Steven knew so well and feared. But it was Steven who was going two days before when he had gone down to the port to get the ticket to Veracruz.

- What a happy coincidence we met here!

Delery was Andre who spoke with his usual lazy and cunning. Ginny did not flinch despite that he wished not to meet anyone I knew.

"Yes, really, what a coincidence. Are you traveling somewhere?"

He shrugged slightly, looking at her with bright eyes, dark as mahogany.

"If luck is with me, I think we will travel together. Or do you think it would take the match beyond what is possible?

And before he had time to reply, smiled, taking her hand.

- Can I buy you a coffee with me? I guarantee that you will be as safe sitting in that cafe, as it was in my house. Or afraid of gossip?

Ginny took his hand but accepted the invitation, thinking: 'Why not? How important can have it? "

Delery was dining with friends at the time that Senator Brandon was wounded and in any case, no man seemed able to pull on someone from the shadows.

The cafeteria had indicated that he was very clean. They were taken to a separate table, located at the back of the room.

"Havana is full of cafes Delery said no story to come.

Ginny caught the intention but made a face of astonishment that, anyway, failed to fool him.

- Oh! Is it where you go to Cuba?

- My heart is breaking! And no one cares! I was just trying to convince her that might amuse visit Havana. It is a city full of attractions, especially if not already known, and also here in Cuba is the route to get anywhere. Do not have friends in Cuba?

Ginny said slowly while stirring coffee:

"If you mean ... Sure! Of course he is talking a. .. Are you a curious look in his eyes ... Yes, my husband who has friends there ... Not always share the same relationships ...

- How insightful you are! And what business the same time! I've always wondered what it would be married ... "She gave a little start. No, not enough to try! I do not like being tied down by anything.

"Come you from one topic to another too quickly. What are we going to talk now?

He laughed heartily, throwing her head back with a gesture that made him appear almost a teenager.

- Do you know? I'm really enjoying this little tête à tête with us. I suppose I must have told him many times but you are a woman very unusual.

- Thank you!

After a brief pause, he said as casually:

"I've heard ... As you know we hear all sorts of rumors around town ... I hear you part to Mexico to meet her husband. That's where he left, is not it?

Ginny sipped black coffee, thinking the answer.

- Is what you really want to know is where my husband is gone or where I go? Could you be a little more honest to save time? I would be glad to answer any of your questions if you answer mine.

"Oh, you want to do good business ... Well, what I wonder is why he decided to accompany her husband to a beautiful widow Cuba to Mexico, leaving his wonderful wife in the role of nurse ... Do you think enough direct question?

As Ginny was expected that he would try to catch her off guard, the expression on her face remained unchanged.

"Pretty straightforward. But I'm sure you already know the answers. My husband had urgent family matters to settle in Mexico and Ana Dos Santos was going to join his parents who own a farm adjacent to my husband's grandfather. As for me, both my father and my stepmother, in part because of him, need someone to care for them until he is able to go home. So ... "she looked into his eyes. And you ... mourning my father had been carefully planned, right? Why did you get rid of him? Or were you pleasing others?

- You are very smart! The smart enough to be an adventurer! He smiled, leaning back in his chair, laying bare their teeth properly aligned which stood out against the olive-colored skin. Did you notice that one I wanted was you? He decided to make it mine but it would have had to kidnap her.

- Held captive? After killing my father, no doubt. They have done this before ... keep me captive, I mean. And the person who did it

never ceased to regret.

She was very proud of herself. There was a tremor in her voice that might betray her, nor had avoided his gaze for a moment.

As a good swordsman, Delery attacked again:

"Maybe that person has not realized the rare gem that had been stolen. Do not judge me so little subtle. No, I do not regret having made my own. I find it fascinating too! What do you think of me?"

"On one hand you're too sure of himself. But does that matter?"

"I could have it. I think it will be much better for both to be friends and not adversaries. Do not you think? He added, leaning forward and lowering his voice: "Your ticket is booked at the Anna B. going to Matamoros. I understand that you leave on Friday with another group of people. So ... Why are you looking for a boat to go to Veracruz? Please do not shatter my heart is telling me that after escaping from a lover.

"You followed me or I was hearing.

It was not said as an accusation but simply establishing a fact.

"I set the task to find out everything I could about you. In some ways I am a very methodical man. And I have many friends here in New Orleans. Besides you can always give a tip. Until Henry Warmoth is affordable in the midst of the corruption!"

A feeling of unreality had been preying Ginny as he spoke. When Andre bound him hand that had been abandoned on the table, saw what his fingers were long.

- What's doing?

He hoped his voice was stronger than his nerves. Andre's eyes seemed to darken while studying.

- Do not disappoint me making me believe they can not imagine! Is not able to take it as an adventure? It appears that you have lost the fire and the audacity of old. Would not you like to have an affair?

I could hardly believe it. But his instinct told him that he was serious. He widened his eyes.

- Do not be a coward! Did not it ever occur to ask why not start a

new life or at least try? Look, out there, this beauty with the sails hoisted. They are getting ready to deploy them, see? The lead where you want to go ... They say the owner is an eccentric who never leaves his room only at night to study the stars. But that, so what? Amaryllis sail for Nassau, Havana and Jamaica and may touch Veracruz before crossing the Atlantic. I booked tickets for two people in that boat. Come on, what has never felt the temptation to play? Do not try wrong. Let's try a week ... or two ... If you then still want to go to Veracruz ... Well, c'est la vie.

I was mad! But still ... Ginny licked his lips.

- Had you actually planned ...? What if I were not willing to gambling or to have an affair? ...

Without releasing her hand, he lifted his shoulders expressively.

- What else could I do? He had decided to possess her by hook or by crook. But mine had decided to do it anyway ... I made some ... certain arrangements ...

- I prefer not knowing!

Suddenly Ginny laughed without knowing whether it was nerves or feeling truly free, free of all ... Limits and boundaries ... responsibilities and memories. Being someone else, starting from scratch. Would it be possible or would she be mad too?

He had tried to go to Mexico alone, without bodyguards who always made her feel imprisoned but, for convenience, dutifully pretended to conform to the plans that had been prepared. What she had planned was to go alone to Veracruz and from there to the small farm that was the only place in the world that he considered his home. After that ... I did not know. Maybe send for their children. Surely Don Francisco was not going to deny that right. "Doing things step by step" had been repeated many times. And now he was there, not about to take a step but a leap in the dark.

- I have no clothes!

- Oh, I thought of that! "He said. I have said many times that I have very good taste ... Please trust me.

It was then that he pointed out that Ginny did not believe in any

way or who had bought his. Always friendly, he made a gesture of acquiescence.

And so now he was there, feeling the heat of the sun on your back and shoulders, and salt water splashing fresh face. A woman in the lists of the ship appeared as Genevieve Remy (you can call me Jenny, Andre had said with some solemnity), with whom he shared memories stretching back two days ago. A lovely woman, judging by the looks of admiration that ran the other passengers, envying the man who was supposed to be her husband.

The alleged husband, who remained his companion for the next two or three weeks, Ginny was not-as she herself admitted, or unpleasant or coercive. It was as if both had been measured from the beginning, so that neither waste time in small moves or subterfuge. In this respect, at least, the relationship reminded the liaison Ginny once had in Mexico with a certain Colonel Miguel Lopez. "The difference is" thought Ginny squinting in the sun while separated from the railing that then I had a head full of dreams and romantic ideas. I knew that I would have gone much better had he left behind all my past. Perhaps that Michel could marry ... "

- How beautiful you this morning, my love! The truth is that you are always beautiful.

Slipping his arm around her waist, Andre Delery bent to kiss her lips wet with salt, whispering:

"So you always have a delicious taste ... Which reminds me that we have been invited to dinner at the captain's table. Should we accept and endure the questions of all the ladies Weird? Or do you think best to give you a good headache?"

There was an unmistakable pride in his way of throwing her head back and tightening the lips.

- I have no intention of shunning anyone! As for questions ... "His eyes darkened with disgust I know ... I will not pretend I can not speak only French or Russian ... You will reply for me ...

He thought back to the cabin they shared to change clothes. The dress had been stained with the sea spray and a few strands of red hair hung down over his neck and damp temples. But Delery seemed perversely determined to keep it there against the railing, looking at their appearance in detail, making Ginny blushed slightly. He said nothing, had learned to control the last two years, but also lowered her eyes and then he whispered:

- How can I answer your questions? You have to admit that not much is know about you ... Just what I was able to discover on my own in just over a week. Usually I feel curious about the women once they have been mine. You're one of the few exceptions.

"Well, I do not know anything about you ... except the obvious," said Ginny softly. Without knowing what had become suddenly uncomfortable. I thought go and change. And he added cautiously, "Did you tell me more?"

"Stay a little longer here with me. The sun dries. You're not the kind of woman who is frightened by a little salt water? ... Also I want to make everyone believe that we are a newly married couple we are going through our honeymoon completely absorbed in one another. If we do not answer your questions too believe indeed that we are leaking and will be more discreet. Do not you agree?"

"Without changing the sneering tone, Delery continued:" Keep looking at me, please, as derritiéndote ... if you are able to do so. Think of the pleasures that I am promising when we get back to the cabin ... No, please, do not look toward the bridge, do not forget that we are watching. With binoculars ... Just now I have seen reflected in the sun.

Ginny shuddered.

"So the captain ...

"The standard booth is also there. And from there, from wherever you are watching. I do not blame you, of course, but ... the mysteries always arouse my curiosity. Is not yours?"

Chapter 14

- Are you Spanish? "He asked surprised.

"No, my mother was French and my father American.

"It must have taken Spanish rulers. His accent is so perfect as a peninsula.

"Well, I spent much time in Mexico ...

- Ah, now explained!

Ginny had become accustomed to questions and their answers were always sufficiently ambiguous not to discover anything about his past or his environment. At last he had made friends with some of the ladies who were on board, having carefully set his clothes and his manners, had concluded that Mrs. Delery was both wealthy and well born. To keep your mind off other problems, Ginny had proposed too many questions, interested in knowing something about Cuba and Havana in particular, which left them very happy.

"You'll see how he likes the quiet life we lead in Havana. And do not believe either that we lack entertainment! Is the theater, which, of course, everyone is dressed up. And the masked dances, gatherings ... Do you think your husband to buy property there? Should tell you to talk with my husband ... He can advise.

"Remember, dear, that a lady never walks the streets of Havana. Have always carry in your fly. If you shop, right down to the coachman in the stores and the clerks will bring you what you look for the car to choose.

Ginny began to realize that gradually disappeared apathy of the early days and he really felt in Havana. As for the revolution in speaking their new friends, not interested at all. Why would interest you? As far as she could understand, the struggle was confined to the central and eastern part of the island, but in Havana, life remained the same as always.

Revolution! He violently with the nose at the thought. He had been mixed in a revolution and that was good enough for her. No, not think about it much. I had no past and did not care much, the future provided they were different. As for Andre, he helped pass

the time and was not too demanding. Ginny had learned to evade his questions but he kept insisting.

"Your husband ... Are you sure you're in Mexico? I've heard is a very rich man ... Do you think little Ana Santos can be convinced to help Cuban rebels?

They were in Nassau, lying in the room of a hotel that had booked Delery cautiously, to learn that they were going to spend two days in the city.

Lying beside her with his body covered in sweat, Ginny turned her head languidly finding his scrutinizing gaze through the veil of her lashes.

- Why are you so interested in the Cuban rebels? Is that the reason for your trip? As for my husband, if he were interested in their plans would be at his side. Do not try to wring myself with questions I can answer, Andre.

Almost distracted he leaned over and began caressing her breasts and back.

- You're a puzzle! I feel very deeply that there are things behind those limpid green eyes ... What kind of woman you really are?

- Did not you say you like mysteries? Already bored with me you had at this time if you could easily read my thoughts.

"Possibly.

He bowed and kissed his neck, slowly lower your hand and pulling at the same time fine cotton sheets that covered it.

- Do you know? "I said sincerely, not usually funny with women who belong to me. You ... 're like a winding mountain road that has a surprise at every turn. And the more you possess ...

When his lips touched the most intimate and Andre felt his reply, followed intrigued trying to explain why he had not yet tired of it. I've never encountered a woman who responded to his touch with such abandon without ceasing to keep a part of itself untouched. I had to teach him the art of love and yet never told him she loved him or had tried to feel guilty about being the wife of another man. Nor had shown jealousy or curiosity about his other lovers. I was

still amazed at how easy it had been convincing her to travel with him, abandoning everything and everyone, no more clothing than he had on and a few jewels. Of course I never thought of kidnapping her, but she had done things that way so it seemed.

Damn it for being such a witch!

He heard her moan softly, enjoyed the gentle curves of her body and let out a groan of pleasure as well as she, turning round, he did enjoy the way he had done enjoy it. How had he learned so much? How many men were their teachers? God! He, who had intended to use it, was also being used by her! It was something I did not like or had never happened. He said he would not be neglected if he would not be difficult to separate from her, at the right time, as agreed in advance. Then, forgetting everything is concentrated solely in the fierce struggle that was developing love between the two. Would awaken in her madness burning and no one had ever raised. The defeat, by submitting to His will for this ... and this ... and this.

The evening was warm, the room was closed and almost suffocating atmosphere despite the open window overlooking the palm-lined promenade planted so close together that they seemed intertwined. When it was over they fell next to each other, both panting, the sheets soaked with sweat from the bodies.

Ginny cried out for some fresh water for washing and a little air to breathe, dreaming of the sea breeze and mountain streams. But I had no strength to move, and his companion, as if divining his thoughts, held her hand tangled in a thick strand of hair. Ginny was lying with closed eyes, and when his breathing began to normalize, heard him, rhythmic and deep, a sure sign that he was falling asleep. She sank into a kind of limbo, half asleep and half awake, on the verge of sleep.

Another warm room. A hotel room in San Antonio where a girl named Ginny Brandon woke to sunlight, throwing off the bed,

pulled by something happening across the open windows, the sprawling, dusty street where a man dark blue shirt had stabbed another. If he had raised his eyes to look at the bewildered audience, Ginny had seen that man's eyes were the color of the shirt. Unfathomable mocking eyes that betrayed no feeling whatsoever and even less love.

"I hate you, Steven Morgan!" His own voice screaming in anger and frustration. And he was immobilized, half suffocated by the weight of his body, the still held there, as she stabbed him and stabbed him, and he was making love, and the birds flying in circles against the merciless heat of the blue Mexican sky. .. Why was she crying? Why was so lonely, so desperate, so terrified? ... Another quarter ... Steven was not only the French colonel who made fun of his defeat, while somber, angular figure of Tom Beal hoped to drag out the paths of horror.

"Steven ... Steven! Where are you? I love you, I love you ... Please save me! "But he walked away with narrowed eyes, though she could guess his expression and a rictus of hatred on the roof.
- Darling! What does this mean? One thing we share, baby, and that is easy to enforce it.

The sound of his voice kept repeating like an echo: 'easy ... easy ... easy ', until it gradually trailed off and she opened her eyes happily back to reality. There was ... Andre lying beside Delery who had hip and leaning on his hand still tangled in her hair. As it was not Andre and Steven, the devil with which Heaven had punished. Steven, who should and should exorcise. Let the devil take him! He had no right to stalk even in his dreams when he surely did not devote any of your thoughts. Certainly Ana Dos Santos would be throwing the rest to keep him busy, as he had before Ginny came on the scene. He should have Andre was admitted to Cuba and not to Mexico where Steven had traveled. But how deprived of the possibility of a voluptuous revenge if they should stumble in Havana?

Andre murmured and squirmed in her sleep, stretching his arm as

if it were defending an invisible attacker. "So Andre also had nightmares? He waited until his breathing was regulated and then tried to put their weight. The room seemed suddenly become unbearably stifling, and felt she was drowning in the suffocating humidity of the atmosphere. She would die if he failed a breath of fresh air! Needed to feel the caress of cold water moving through the body! Had not seen a natural pool with a small waterfall between rocks covered with moss, in one of the rides that had been given early in the morning? On the other side of an old nearly overwhelmed by vines in bloom. Ginny had planned to continue exploring the place, but Andre was calling. "Who lives there?" He had asked the boy that she had chosen to guide. The boy shrugged his shoulders.

"Do not know. Very old house, falling as fence. Patron going to Jamaica. Much larger island, that one.

Part of the freedom to belong only to herself, was able to do exactly what he wanted. Was it well or not? Ginny stood naked from the bed and crossed the room carelessly passing hands through his hair. He glanced at the mirror while putting on the simple cotton dress she had worn that morning. Now no whales or hoops that had to be done before to look more elegant. The Mexican woman bare feet, did not care much for respecting the fashions that were just a relic. The woman was now in place was not very different from before, except perhaps that was not so thin and had lost that air of living stalked and frightened.

Ginny pulled her hair atop his head with the aid of a few forks and decided not to put on their walking boots fine. He made some bows on the front, much like those used by the mulatto women of New Orleans and, with a colored handkerchief he had bought that morning from a seller's dock, head completely covered her hair hiding bronze . I was ready to start your little adventure. He grinned at the mirror, hoping not to find any known on the road. There was no such thing likely to happen there in that small hotel. I had asked Andre to seek a hotel where it was not easy to trip over

his new friends on board, to be alone and rest well. So far had spent the time rehearsing how to recognize each other with their minds and bodies. Game that both were very fond.

"But I need to have some time alone to think," Ginny said as he walked barefoot along a path covered with grass so thick it was like walking on a plush carpet. Until then he had not encountered any living soul. Probably there was the custom, as in Mexico, to take a nap. The sun bathed his head like a shower of gold until it reached a relatively cool mall. Even the incessant buzzing of insects seemed to have calmed down. Occasionally a gust of hot air was hitting the tops of the palms together with a sound like a troubled breathing. Ginny began to walk faster, hoping not to find any snake on the way and finally arrived breathless and sweaty to the battered fence bent beneath the weight of the overgrown vines. In the pool at the other side, shining raindrops illuminated by the sun filtering through the leaves, making them appear as green lights.

What sounded inviting and refreshing water the murmur of the waterfall! Under the coat, skin burning clamoring for cool.

Unaccustomed to being invaded, the birds of bright plumage, perhaps taking it for another woodland creature, flew around and then came back to the trees. Nobody would come over there ...

Probably there was no one around! Was that an enchanted place, an oasis where time passed ...

Without another thought, Ginny took off her headscarf and pulled off her robe. Pulling to one side completely submerged in water.

Someone would make a lot of time, dug this pond on the creek, forming what looked like a completely natural pool, covering it with stones round it, then lined with moss, gave the green hue.

Singing birds, buzzing bees, sun and shadow ... Without thinking about anything, left entirely to the sensuality of the moment,

Ginny closed her eyes and remembered a poem by Andrew Marvell had always liked. How was it? ... Something like ... "... sucking all created with one thought green, shaded green ... "Bah ... What did

it matter? He was too lazy to start thinking ... I just wanted to enjoy the caress of the water and the pleasure of feeling her hair float free in that moment of full sensuality ...

The curly hair was like burnished copper wire, scattered over the green water. In contrast to the peach skin of the face, dark eyebrows shading his eyes stretched slightly torn. Greens, like emeralds I used to use. Crazy mouth kissing men with promising pleasures and follies they desperately wanted to see fulfilled.

At that thought the man, still, witnessing the scene from close range, under the shade of trees. I had seen before, without her noticing. But not like now, enjoying her nudity. The women of her generation, especially if they were calling themselves the "ladies" are not removed their clothes so carelessly and shamelessly bathe completely naked in the open. Nor would go through the woods, barefoot and clad half in search of the isolation of that place. It seemed that she had heard his thoughts or meaning to his heavy breathing. If they had been living in the times of ancient Greece, he had believed he had found a dryad, with enough charms to entice Zeus himself. The thought made him pucker the mouth. No, he was the king of the gods but a mere mortal. But still, a worthy companion of the man she had chosen to make the trip, which was not her husband. Andre had studied Delery, had made some inquiries about him and had dismissed it, convinced that he had no importance in her life. As had guessed, the two traveled together for convenience. It will stay together long ... All the better, because he had felt the call of the senses from the first time she laid eyes on it. Even then he knew he was ready to give everything I had to go around the world if necessary, to make it their own and satisfy his every whim. At the same time his instinct told him that if that woman was worthy of being conquered, it was also worth preserving. And to keep it would be taught to love it. There was no other way to preserve the woman who called herself "Genevieve Remy.

Chapter 15

Jim Bishop was displeased. Another man, thought to himself prudently Paco Davis has indicated the violence of his anger. He was limited to light a cigarette after another and drummed his fingers nervously on the table. In retaliation, Paco began to whistle out of tune.

Jim Bishop gave him a reproving look, and after his throat, he said:

- Are you sure you have not left anything to be done?

Paco looked offended.

- Do you believe me capable? I've always been very devoted to Ginny, except that once saved my own skin. No, I have not stone unturned. Do you say it? It was ... without leaving a note, leaving nothing. Her maid was hysterical. The preparation had left the room, saying he had to do some last-minute shopping and pick up a hat that had commissioned. He said he would return to the dinner.

Paco heard the sigh of impatience Bishop and shivered inside. What the hell ... If Jim was going to be doing the same thing again and again, you ... Maybe between the two would get to get to unravel the mystery. As appreciation for Ginny was absolutely sincere, confident that their hunches were not met.

He continued talking, charging themselves with patience, watching Bishop, distracted, did little drawings on the table.

"Jim, I've seen a thousand times every detail, every possibility. The hat did not see her, no one tripped over it anywhere. You told me to act with discretion and did not notice her disappearance, so I took some time finding out, for a friend of a friend, a woman who responded to the address I had given him, had bought a ticket to Veracruz. He asked all the shipping agencies and only one recalled seeing her.

-Delery ... Let us return to Delery. Delery left New Orleans the same day as Steven's wife disappeared. "Where was he?

-In France on a business trip, he told his friends.

They say it was something we had planned for some time. The ship makes a stop wearing it naturally in many countries, including Cuba. Are you thinking that has gone to Cuba and not France?

As if he had not heard, Bishop said thoughtfully:

"We know that such Delery Andre is not stupid. We have almost full certainty that the money so freely scatters, Spanish is money. And who wins eliminating certain characters who are not liked by the Cuban revolutionaries fighting against. It is true there is fighting continuously. He is a man of bad temper, eh? This is what allows us to be not completely safe. But the 'affaire Brandon' makes me think that was behind our friend Brandon, knowingly decided to fund a filibustering expedition to Cuba, which has the active solidarity and advising wealthy Cubans living in the United States. This would be easy to guess. The Cubans were spying each other. But Delery, which is of French extraction ... to deal with him must have lots of money.

Paco looked up bumping into the pensive look of it by pausing to light a cigarette more.

-Delery has another weakness, right? Bishop asked softly, answering himself. Women. It has a reputation as a Casanova. A while ago you mentioned that when purchasing your ticket, also booked a berth in the cabin for a lady. "Mrs. Delery?

"Yeah, sure, but that was more than ten days.

"Of course not married by then.

Paco started.

"No, certainly not. It sounds like the kind of man willing to marry. In any case the woman traveling with him can not be Ginny, if that's what you're implying. According to all witnesses, shipped together with a mountain of luggage, especially the lady. And were very tender with each other ... If it had intended to kidnap Ginny, she had defended tooth and nail. I've seen her fight y. ..

Bishop said dryly:

"It may have gone their own will.

It was obvious that Paco had not considered that possibility. A look of disappointment clouded her face. With a female so unpredictable and temperamental as Ginny, anything is possible!

- For Christ! "Paco swore. If so, and Steven get to find out ...

"Steven is very busy at the moment. Engaged in business. We can not get in touch with him until he did not contact us. I see no reason to ... to sound the alarm until we are certain of the facts. Paco Bishop threw a look and went soberly reassuring: "I hope when you get to Cuba is not going to say a word. I take responsibility to find the lady.

Bishop was accustomed to keep his thoughts. But the truth is that it could not fail to acknowledge with regret that the young man in question is specialized in creating conflict, not to mention the chorus of gossip and intrigues that was rising in its wake. The problem is that women were not consistent. Always gave a lime and sand without allowing other men never know where they were. If you really Ginny, to satisfy a whim, had taken to his heels with Andre Delery, which face the consequences. He would ensure that the matter should speak as little as possible and to that end, had arranged for the 'Lady of Steven Morgan "came as planned due to Matamoros. Then take care of the rest.

Always true to himself, Bishop uttered not even a smile, explaining to Paco what were the arrangements he had made. It was short and concise and was not moved a facial muscle when Paco, leaping from his chair and began to pace the room, seemed to lose his temper.

- Now I know you are really crazy! Okay God ... And I must be crazy to continue working with you also. No, dammit! Yo, Paco Davis, I'm going to dress as a woman, you hear? I veiled, all you need! Hang it, I have been taught to wear skirts! Forget it, Jim! Find yourself another fool! Before I go to swim to Cuba ...!

"If so, you will not have to swim too ... A boat will pick you up when you fall overboard in the second night of sailing. Until then the cabin will not leave with the pretext that you are "dizzy".

In the end, Paco obeyed orders as he had been taught to do. Even-if necessary-so far as to tell Steven Morgan that his wife had fallen into the sea without being able to do anything to save her. While Paco kept shouting, Jim Bishop turned his thoughts to other matters. I thought Steven Morgan what he was doing and how their plans would be fulfilling. It was hoped that it had already reached the destination in the company of beautiful young woman who had agreed to return voluntarily to him. Steven never had difficulty accepting that women with the best will do what he wanted them to do, and Ana Dos Santos was no exception. What a happy coincidence that she had landed in New Orleans at the precise moment they need it to fit into your plans!

With his head languidly on the shoulder of the young man who had surrounded his arms, Ana Dos Santos said gently:

"I wanted to visit New Orleans ... I'm so glad I did and that we have become to find! Do you think it was fate, Stephen?

She noticed the slight movement of his shoulder and realized that he was once more talking. But she was tired of the silence between them and wanted to point it out.

"My dear, do not believe in fate? After all once thought we were going to be husband and wife ... And now, years later, here we are traveling together as a married couple. Do not you think in a way that it ought to be?

For the love of God! Why did they continually strive to maintain this talk, without rhyme or reason?

She had turned her head at him with expectant eyes and Steven had to work to contain an outbreak of rabies and answer briefly:

"Things go better when we reach our destination. Make love in this dilapidated cart has its drawbacks, especially as we are surrounded by a jealous guard.

"But the soldiers did not take her with us, might seem suspicious. They would think we are allies of the rebels! Please Stephen, do

not so clearly demonstrate your dissatisfaction or going to think ...!
His voice had become timid false chuckled and muttered, trying to guess the look in his eyes:

"After all they think we are still in honeymoon and you do not think more than me. And so ... Right? Is not being able comfortably to love what you so grumpy?

- Is not that reason enough?

He could not answer otherwise but the truth is that his thoughts were aimed in another direction and were not too pleasant, especially when fixed upon Mr. Bishop. To hell with Mr. Bishop and his well-calculated plans! Far more frequently than desirable, they threw things happened all by land and he was forced to improvise to keep going. I had thought launched in search of his grandfather once had presented his credentials to speak in some way in Havana. He had also thought as elegantly as possible get rid of Anne which had already begun to bore you. But certain events forced him to accept that the persistent Ana would come to their "rescue", stating that they were husband and wife, 'rescued' to herself. With wide eyes and a look of innocence that surprised the irascible Captain General, innocently asked if the fact of being married to a Mexican not she too became a Mexican citizen. Naturally, she had no sympathy for the rebels and also not interested in politics that was for men.

It was at that moment when, hiding the confused feelings of anger and admiration that came with the clever stratagem by Ana, Steven stepped politely

"Indeed, Sir, is that I am here just to take care of my wife planting. I heard that my grandfather, Francisco Alvarado, is also in Cuba. The hoax gave the desired result. Pieltain general's face cleared a little. He dedicated his penetrating gaze to look at Steven with interest and curiosity.

- Ah! "So you're the grandson of Don Francisco? If you had told me before he understood why he needed a pass. His grandfather got his thank my predecessor, Gen. Ceballos. I never would have

allowed a gentleman of the age of Francisco, had made such a journey through rebel territory. However ...

Steven quickly taking the word, immediately said:

"I understand, sir. If I had not been out when my grandfather started the trip, had been in place. But now I'm here, can you tell me if you have heard from him since he left Havana?

-No. I'm afraid not. But perhaps that is not a concern. The ranch of Mr. Allen is in a very remote area and communications are pretty damaged right now. And on top with those damned rebels putting everything upside down!

Continued with a series of paternalistic considerations regarding the Mexican situation. Pretending nothing less than to rule themselves! The Creoles accepting an indigenous president! That does not happen in Cuba! ...

Steven had managed to keep calm. Keep calm with the condescending governor of red stripes, which expanded the delivery of the pass that would allow him to move for a week and stay calm with Ana who was starting to behave as if they were really husband and wife. Now he had no choice but to accept the custody of an escort did not know if it was protecting or guarding. It was possible that General Pieltain was not as easy as it looked ... In short, it was just an idea.

He felt that Ana put her hand on his thigh and snuggled against him, pushing him with her breasts at every movement of the steering wheel in which they were traveling.

- Dear, do not get that! I'm sure this will not last much longer. And it is truly an honor ... Julian Zulueta is the most powerful man in Cuba and has invited us to think ...

Anna seemed excited and her fingers began to touch ever more insistently.

-Stephen, says that controls up to the governors of Cuba ...

The triumphalism of Ana vaunted half-concealed sexual excitement that her breathing quickened. Men can impose its will on other men. But a woman who knows what she wants, who can

deny the pleasure to give and to get a man, above all, want to violently ... That it imposed its will ...! The father of Anne who had so fond of her, she had taught. He also warned, of course, that does not leave too much control by her former boyfriend.

"I remember how she thought she was Anne, but I've learned a lot since then ... I've learned enough to keep it. I will need me, you can not do without me ... Then we are really husband and wife. As we had been to not appear that damn green-eyed French whore ... " Naturally, he no longer loved his wife! Have not had humiliated publicly demonstrate their affections were on the other? The past is ... What mattered was the present ... Stephen and she will stay together for long ...

Collection in their own thoughts, however vehemently Ana returned the kiss he gave her brutal, cutting the thread of his thoughts. Soon he began to moan softly as she felt his fingers on the chest of Steven playing with her nipples after having lowered the neckline of the dress that barely covered her curves.

The pleasure of Anne had turned in blind fury, had he known that Steven had started to kiss her just because she was tired of hearing it and tired of their misguided attempts to excite him sexually. The trouble was that he could read the thoughts of Anna too easily!

Anne and did not wake him early promises nor concealed mystery. The bitter truth was that the only woman who was intrigued and was never sure which was his own wife.

Ginny ... Quicksilver What a woman! Can you ever escape your memory?

Chapter 16

The moonlight on the ocean, Ginny became thoughtful. The night was too beautiful to bear ... How could anyone be able to sleep or be down there concentrated on a game table? Leaning his elbows on the railing, Ginny looked at the mirror of water, he turned to see the ghostly candles and turned his gaze to the sea.

"I could spend my life sailing and eventually stopped at a ghost

ship, no yesterday and no tomorrow ... At the edge of eternity. "His thoughts were so deep and uncontrollable as the ocean waters and free flowing in all directions. What thoughts! Forget what I wanted to forget ... Steven, Steven had often managed to develop a convenient amnesia ... Why the hell did you think of Steven, responsible for her being there? He should have been down with Andre. Seeing him play cards would have been better to be there alone with no one to share that moonlit night. Realizing that was a sigh, Ginny straightened. No, I was depressed! He refused to look back. I had to look forward starting a new life for herself and her children ... Steven did the same. Once the injuries inflicted on his pride had healed soon forget it ... If he had not forgotten and with the help of Ana .. In any case he could never forgive him for Sonya. Never forget what he had seen and heard that day ...!

It looked like a white and silver statue shaded by darkness. He had roses pinned to the abundant curls of her beautiful hair and her delicious perfume came faintly to dilated fins tall man's nose, in the shadow of the mainmast, was watching as so often did. He had asked several times if she would ever captured the reflection of the telescope with which he watched and cared even if being spied something. He knew that was a woman who is constantly referred knew. He was perfectly aware of herself, not afraid of her naked body and, of course, also not afraid to walk alone out there. A different woman all! The woman who spoke their stars!

The man to watch, smiled doubtfully wondering if she would believe in astrology. What is its history? Why would have landed there aboard his boat with a man who was obviously an adventurer who was not her husband? Perhaps it was a woman who had escaped, restless and hungry for emotions. Whatever it was, was not an ordinary woman and he wanted her.

The ship began to rise and fall on the waves, the wind freshened and Ginny felt his beating his face. It appeared that the schooner was chasing the moon, this pure silver disc against a velvet sky. The wind lifted the skirts of her dress and threw her wet hair tufts

and salty on the front but she refused to go below deck and miss the shocking beauty of the night. Neither wanted to be alone with your thoughts ... What I wanted, so he sighed, was for ... Why? How and where to end this affair? What would be your final destination and what their fate? It was possible that a happy night like that, she only had to ask the questions and answers alone come across as a moonbeam blown ...

Ginny sighed and turned back had resolved to end his fanciful dreams moles, if hands do not have tight shoulders from behind and a man's voice she had not said softly in his ear:

"Daughter of fate, how long does it travels towards its destination? It froze on the site without daring to turn his head. The voice that had addressed it had a pleasant baritone and an accent difficult to place. The hands that rested on his shoulders were warm and tender. I was tempted to throw her head back, close your eyes and surrender to the magic of the moonlit night.

As if he would have been guessing the thoughts, urged saying "No, no, please, do not become yet. Do not you realize it's a night haunted? I was able to follow his thoughts that came and went like waves on a rough sea. I sensed his longing and loneliness ... So I went. I just want to stay that way ... so, feeling the smoothness in the hands of his shoulders and enjoy your perfume ... And if you want to talk ... It's easier to confide to a stranger than a friend ... Confession to a priest who is behind the grill, right? ... The charm can be broken if you turn your head or if she asks me to leave them alone.

Ginny did none of both. She shuddered slightly and said so softly as his:

- Are you a priest? Or only a wizard can read thoughts? You see I'm trying not to break the spell by asking directly who you are. But do you think is good to play a guessing game?

She heard his laughter and felt more comfortable when he said with mock solemnity:

"Yes, I think it's fine. Especially since I have the advantage of

knowing the name under which you travel, of course, is not true. Do not get angry, it does not matter. The names do not count ... They are like the titles are inherited or borrowed. I myself have several ... all different. What counts is that in a wonderful night like this, you are single and not too happy. If possible, I would help her.

"You seem sincere. But is there someone who really is? Why are the people that fear of being absolutely honest with each other? And they like to say things and make promises that are not true and never have been some ... Oh, that music! ... Will you really a witch and no one will really behind me? Am I really listening to music?

The notes heard out of a stringed instrument played softly. It was a strange music that reminded Ginny of flamenco, flamenco but it was not even something he had on his obsessive lament. A sweet melody repeated and repeated ... Why? ... Why? ... Why? ...

"The music is true. I asked to be touched especially for you. If you listen well, you hear a story behind the whole range of human emotions. But the music and the night are just mounting the scene ... Oh, if you let the catharsis to occur ...

Ginny gasped and felt he dived into something very strange. Whoever he was, had a diabolical power to read his mind and play with your emotions. If I wanted to break the spell all I had to do was ...

But instead, kept looking at the moon and said thoughtfully:

"It means that if I ... Do I let forth freely all my thoughts and my emotions, I feel better? ... Perhaps you are right. Sometimes it has happened to me when I lost my temper ...

After Ginny would think that it was the strangest night of his life. It is possible that the excess would have upset the moonlight ... Or that he had been carried away by the wine and those who were playing cards below deck and the next day, did not know how they came to their beds. But she had been talking with a man she had seen in his life. He saw the golden moon was becoming lost in the

skyline.

He had been drinking white wine in a glass that shone as if carved out of quartz. Soon rested her head on it quite naturally, realizing that barely reached his shoulder and that the stranger had a very pleasant smell ... it was not to snuff like other men.

No, he had been drugged because she remembered everything perfectly. He had accepted the "rules" that he had suggested at the beginning and had not turned to face him. The priest behind the confessional! ... That was the image he had created. Maybe that was it ... a priest. Perhaps he was disguised ... In any case it did not matter because he was friendly and helpful and at no time had taken advantage of their vulnerability. It was probably the only man who had not done.

For once, Ginny slept that night without nightmares that haunt and reluctantly awoke when he crossed Andre possessive arm around the body.

- So you're here? I do not remember at all having come to bed.

Merde! My head like I was going to explode!

- Should I call the waiter? Anyway I would call him to ask him to bring me hot water to bathe. I feel clean when we go down to the ground.

Ginny ignored the reluctant gesture he made to stop and jumped out of bed with bare legs. Also ignored the nagging. He wrapped himself in a robe and began brushing her hair vigorously in the mirror. Their shadows, fortunately, were not too noticeable. But it helped convince the previous night had been real. Without wishing to be immersed in their own reflections. What he had driven to tell a strange man whose face had not even seen, so much of herself?

"Will I ever meet him? And if I find, can I recognize it? Why so much interest in me? "

"I hope to call the waiter when you're done looking at you with such fierce concentration. My poor head! ... But turn around ...

Yes, you're as charming as ever ... especially so early in hours.

Hope you're not sulking for having neglected last night.

Ginny pulled strongly from the bell smiled and replied, glaring over his shoulder.

- Oh, believe me, I felt abandoned at any time last night! There was a wonderful moon ... It's a shame you lost it ...

As had been proposed, let Andre pensive, pondering the meaning of his words. "What is the very evil witch! There will ... is very capable of having allowed himself to console ...

It is capable of being made to seduce me jealous ... Who have been the lucky guy? "

Shortly after Andre had to concentrate on other problems that interested him most.

When he came on deck after careful grooming, he found his buddies last night embroiled in the arduous debate at the sudden change of course that events had taken. The pattern of the Amaryllis, the eccentric that had everyone intrigued, had suddenly decided to bow to the little bay of Gibara.

"They say it is the first port touched Columbus," said Mr. Bartholomew.

A Jamaican with a cigar in his mouth, who claimed to have a limitless capacity for drink, also seemed to be suffering from the excesses of the previous night.

I can not say it affects me too much. He added reluctantly, "I'm wishing I were in my plantation and you know Havana, a city stinking and dirty.

"The captain made an announcement that everyone seems to forget.

The speaker was an American from Florida who exaggeratedly wrinkled his brow as he massaged his temples.

- Oh yeah, and what he said?

The calm tone of Andre tried to hide the anger that was beginning to feel seeing their rich man's whim, carefully planned, it came with a crash to the ground. He tried to maintain his composure while the other continued.

"He said he would fix the way they arrived in Havana all who had

urgent business in the city. He said something that he had solved the water supply ... I was not paying much attention when he spoke. But Gibara seems a very beautiful place to spend one or two days. Then we headed for Santiago de Cuba before sailing to Jamaica.

- Ah! Andre said without conviction, and then irrelevantly. Why, mes amis, we all have such long faces this morning? I swear I drank too much ... much more than the night before last.

He laid his eyes slightly at his mistress wearing fresh and rosy in her white muslin dress overskirt covered by a colored block. The witch had chosen that very dress for it! Why she knew early that morning they were going to touch down ahead of schedule?

Chapter 17

View from the bay entrance, Gibara looked like a postcard, extending crescent shaped by the steep slope. Three mountains peaks lifted their whimsical shapes the sky behind the village. A Cuban gentleman requested report to the other passengers that the mountains were named Silla, Pan and Tabla.

"How do you call if you would not?" Andre Delery asked, still angry, bitterly watching how the Amaryllis was approaching the coast. Ginny and the other passengers exclaiming with excitement at the sight of the colorful houses, tile roofs, stretched over the hill. She seemed, indeed, very excited at the prospect of being sentenced to spend two days in this small fishing village. Delery Andre's mouth twitched slightly more closely studying his traveling companion through the lashes of her eyes. If at that moment her eyes were set toward another man or if he had ignored some of them ostensibly, their suspicions had been confirmed. But no, Ginny was still acting as normal while showing him the joy did Andre chattering teeth and want to hit a jolt. What stuck walking? What had she been? Unaccustomed to worry about women, Andre was so angry with himself and with Ginny.

More than disappointed, would have been angry if he knew that

Ginny was not going to follow him to Havana. After meeting in the light of the moon, Ginny jealously hid his thoughts behind his broad smile. It was going to Veracruz. I thought to go directly to the small farm and take their children with her again learning the craft of being a mother. The children were his. It was she who had suffered the hardships of pregnancy. He had wanted to have his child and had given birth to two. Steven was not worried about anything. If you no longer loved her, how could love their children?

"From now on I will leave no more. Go where you go I will take with me. Will organize my life and my children without his intervention at all. "

Leaning on the strength of its resolutions, Ginny found it easy to evade the questions of Andre Delery suspicious. He had confirmed his first impressions. As her former lover, Miguel Lopez, Andre was an honest cynic. Like Miguel, he was an opportunist and had taken only to use it. Why should she not use him too?

He did not talk about anything important with Andre, who was in a bad mood, even after they had landed and been taken to your accommodation: a blue cottage pie, all homes built as typical Cuban, said Andre told her in a dining room facing the street and did also serve as a lobby.

"Even the horses come around here, I understand. You see these iron bars? Do not rely on-glass windows .Le said, adding sarcastically: "Why do we have the honor of giving us a house to ourselves? I thought that would take us to the inn, if there is one in this old poblacho. What do you think, kiddo? Suddenly you've become strangely silent ...

"I'm thinking that I love this little house. See what yard more beautiful and how cool it is! Beyond that I have not had time to think about anything. Why give him more laps to things?

Without paying the slightest attention to the beautiful lady who had brought into the yard, Andre took her arm and forced her to face him.

"And you, Mrs. Morgan, how ugly and nasty name! Will there be a business or a result you have I been scammed?

She looked at him as equals, without trying to escape his heavy arm.

- Cheated, Mr. Delery? I never presented myself as a business, is not it? Remember, I warned that it was not for sale. If what you wanted to do business, he should have looked elsewhere.

To his surprise, Delery laughed heartily.

- Touché, Madame! No need to remind me that you are intelligent as well as beautiful ... Neither has negligible experience. Why would I pay to do a business that I was serving tray?

"In a moment it seemed they were going to come to blows, but suddenly, the Lord changed his mind and dragged the woman to one of the bedrooms," he told the housekeeper, the lady of the house a little after - . No, she does not seem to mind too. It's very macho him. Shortly after he was eating in his eyes and Conchita ... -. The woman hesitated a moment and interrupted Mrs. clipped "Yes ... What else?

"It was very strange ... You know what that is Conchita and bold, yet this time she felt embarrassed when he proposed such a thing. Asked him to go to bed at night ... to the bed he shares with his wife ...

- And the lady? Is it that she does not care?

She pursed her lips.

"Conchita asked the same thing. The gentleman laughed, as Conchita told me, and said he wanted to surprise the lady.

Conchita says he is very persuasive. He told ... he hinted that there would be no problem, no problem. He even offered money. Naturally, Conchita refused! She likes men, it is true, but not a bad girl.

"Glad to hear it ... What next?

"Well, you know, this morning I said I had to go to market to buy

some things. The lady was sleeping but Mr accompanied me for a while. I said I had to get tickets to travel to Havana, he and Mrs.. I asked many questions about the owners of the room and I told him exactly what you told me to tell. I am a widow trying to get ahead.

Ginny waited pretending to be asleep until he heard the thud of the heavy front door, announcing that Andre was gone. Only then opened the eyes of all, first stretching and then slowly stretching like cats altogether. He dropped the sheets on the floor covered with mats. Devil Andre! It was hoped that would not come back too soon. Andre with his inexhaustible inventiveness to the love games that she was compelled to share ... Like a slut if he had taken from a house of tolerance ... She shuddered at the memory. Some of the things he had said, the lashes had shaken as though, in time, she had tried to delete them as if he had not been nailed into the mind and as if she had not been affected.

- Oh, I thought you were a little more honest than most women! And it would not be possible to take surprise yourself! And it turns out you are from women who have already done almost everything and is yet willing to do what you have not tried ... Do not let me down, baby.

"There are things I'm not willing to do just to satisfy your extravagant whims. You are wrong with me, Andre Delery!

"No, I do not. You're a courtesan of soul! I am sure you will do anything and everything you dare to ... By the way ... I'm not selfish to deny your own pleasure. I think you'll like that make you both love a man and a woman. You never suggested your husband? Why did you remind your husband? Why I had to be always remembering that once had been a whore and worse than a whore? So many men in her life! Steven first, whom she blamed for everything that had happened. Some had been forced, others not. Delery Andre was here with his own free will. He was a stranger to her, just an acquaintance and had run away with him letting him

enjoy her body. It was not unusual to be allowed to insult!
Still scowling, Ginny jumped out of bed, completely naked and approached the standing mirror foresight in the corner of the room. He stuck out his tongue to the image that was reflected in it. When I was younger, had done so many times. Only after then used to break into laughter. Now was not laughing. He felt listless and with a strange sense of heaviness. What kind of woman was this who stared back, pale woman with bright eyes and challenge under a mop of red hair?

"Am I going to stop making exactly the sort of woman who calls me Steven? Am I going to allow its conduct check mine? I'm not after all a rude girl who sticks out her tongue blatantly older people to laugh at them behind their backs. "

Ginny felt more light-hearted when he finished talking to herself. After all, she had already decided what to do. Andre did not matter much. If you did not want, did not have to put more eyes on her. The pretty girl with brown eyes seemed anxious to make conversation, especially after knowing that the lady was speaking Spanish. Would the lady object to bathe in the yard? The house was locked from all sides and there was nobody there. A marble fountain where two cherubim with two separate water jugs thrown into a corner, Ginny persuaded to accept the proposal. Wide steps covered with mosaics blue as the rest of the pool, they allowed people of any height could sit comfortably. The water was clean and clear as crystal. Conchita explained with pride that the hostess had used water from a stream running down the mountainside.

"Look, lady, there's a hole out the water and thus remains constantly clean and fresh. Then, if the Lord wills, I will bring fruit or a drink. It's going to be very hot.

The pool was shaded by trees. There were palm trees, pomegranates and orange mignonette that grew into huge vats. The vines are entangled in the posts of the gallery, making the house look more Spanish than Cuban. It was a beautiful and quiet corner. All that Ginny seemed ready to enjoy it. And I would enjoy it,

forgetting everything that was not present.

Lulled by the cool water caress her body bathed, Ginny closed her eyes to the sunlight that filtered through the trees and began to think about what she should wear and whether or not it would take a walk. Conchita had said the cathedral was beautiful, which reminded him that he had not heard mass since leaving Mexico. Well, after a while would do everything possible to regain some energy. I assumed that something was not right, but had always been a hedonist.

From the shadows of the gallery, the owner of the house owner also Amaryllis-watching his beautiful guest with binoculars, as so often had done. The observed trying to find some defect in the body that he considered perfect. And because she had watched her lover could not help. It was not in any way a vicious and regretted having to resort to these methods so that it can admire but ... How could it happen that, which encrypts all your pride in your ability to master the passions and not be governed by nothing more than his intellect, had fallen into such a sorry state? I was spying on the woman he loved, trying to suppress their most primal instincts that asked him to run toward her, also shedding their clothes and naked as a satyr, to join her in the pool. The wanted. The mere fact of desiring it was an event in your life. He had always treated women with sensitivity and consideration, although the desire was not always present in your relationship with them. She acted like a man, more by feel than by mental requirement urged by the senses. Now, however, was about to put aside all caution and jump on it to make her his.

He waited, however, appealing to all his willpower, because it was not only possess what he wanted. Not only wished that her body was ready to surrender, eager for their hugs ... He also wanted his mind and his love. The wife wished for anything regardless of their past.

In the hot calm of the morning, Ginny stood beside the pool waiting for the sun to dry. I had the temptation to return to the

source and spend the day enjoying the delicious sensuality of fresh water, but not if Andre back and found it bare there, sure to meet with her and not just for swimming.

- Which of your clothes you want the lady who brings her to wear? Conchita was determined to be helpful and seemed not to be bothered by looking at another naked woman. He hesitated a little and added:

"In the body of the dress she wore yesterday, there Mrs a tear. If I had seen before, he had mended.

"You can stay with him. She was tired of that dress.

The tear had been responsible for Andre. He was impatient because the unexpected negative and had pulled her dress a tug-as so often had Steven-until she cried angrily to let her calm, that would undress herself. Then, much to his regret, his body had responded to the caresses of Delery wise. And he had erased from her mind everything that was not the pure enjoyment of sensuality. Now, heedless of the stuttered words of appreciation that Conchita gave him with his round eyes wide open, chose a yellow dress with a golden Polish finished in a ruffle of white lace at the neck and around the neckline. A nice outfit for a walk. Despite the heat was determined to take a walk. Try to see how he managed to board early in the Amaryllis and avoiding a meeting with Andre. Now that he knew more Delery, was sure he would be able to take her to Havana to force if that was his wish. It was better not let him know what his plans!

Another servant, a middle-aged black Ginny had not seen before, opened the heavy screen door that led into the street. Ginny noticed a faint smoke in the great hall where the front, right next door, was the inevitable fire, a coal permanently on so that the gentlemen could light the cigars. Does the servant would smoke cigarettes on the widow of Montejo? Or is that the beautiful widow had many male guests? It was not his, he reproached Ginny. And he could not avoid a sharp rebuke when the intense heat and dazzling light outside was hit squarely. Not in vain

Conchita had looked like she was crazy. It was certainly the worst time of day to go for a walk.

"There's a fly waiting for the lady.

The black man said the words without any intonation.

"Unless the Lord has changed his mind. It's almost nap time.

In spite of the blankness of his voice was disapproving eyes of black. A young woman going out without an escort! Noticing this, Ginny finally deciding.

"Thanks," Crisp said. If Mr back before me, tell ... I went to tell the church.

Chapter 18

Ginny thought Andre off off if they returned earlier than expected and decide to go out and get. His first ride in a fly, despite the novelty of the experience, there had been very comfortable. When the old cathedral vaults and cream with red-tiled towers came into view, asked the coachman who drove the silver horse with tools to stop, with a sigh of relief. Which vehicle stranger! Two huge wheels of four feet in diameter were set very low on the straps holding the car. It gave the feeling of traveling along the ground and was hard to see the landscape by the size of the wheels and the dust raised by the horse's legs. And the heat ... How hot, God! Le temples throbbed and her hands were sticky. Her eyes ached and she could only think of the coolness that seemed to offer the church.

- But, Madam! Masses are said not at this hour! Maybe later ...

"I see the church inside. It must be very old. You can wait outside or come get me at ... say in an hour. I do not want anyone to know where I am.

Just realized what I was saying. Such was his desperation to escape from the relentless sun and shelter in the cool shade of the church, to calm the growing feeling of nausea at times. He had become extremely pale and small beads of sweat glistening on his face. The young man sitting in his silver chair, cast a worried look,

seeing beyond the beauty that had attracted attention since the first moment of his pallor scared now. Even the lips had lost color and his hand was cold when he helped her out of the wheel.

He would have liked to stay and accompany her inside the church but the horse was restless, anxious no doubt to get back to the barn. It was very unhealthy for an American, and worse if female, be at that hour in the sun ... It was very stupid ... But of course it was not his place to tell the lady.

Very reluctantly, the young former slave turned the wheel and drove to the house. Sweat bathed his face and soaking his starched collar. I hated wear that uniform that identified him as a domestic. He wanted to be in the mountains with which the Spanish called "rebels", following his hero, the brave Antonio Maceo. Yet, because of a pair of black eyes and a red mouth and mocking, here he was, dressed like a fop livery, at the hottest time of day, when any sensible person would be taking a nap.

The Manuel scowl suddenly disappeared into a mischievous grin and began to whistle. The nap! Yes, at this hour, Conchita would be fully nap. Of course it would have stripped all his clothes to get rid a bit of heat and, half asleep, I usually allow some freedoms denied. Why not be the aguadoras Conchita as the front who knew what men wanted and gave it instead of playing cat and mouse, promising everything for marriage? Conchita was needing a good scolding. He was a man, not a creature ... he would put in place once and for all by giving an ultimatum. Or became his mistress o. .. he'd leave. And probably not see him again. It was said that the fight against the hated Spanish and with so-called "volunteers peninsular" lasting years.

Manuel began to whistle softly. What a stroke of luck! Thanks to a quirk of young foreign woman would have an hour, maybe more, with Conchita. He imagined that it would face when she opened her eyes and found his hand ... Manuel's eyes flashed before crossing himself wishing for luck. Would to God that no one else was awake in the town! And it also wanted to find red hair lady of

many interesting things in the church. Maybe it was God's house to meet a lover. And the excitement was the reason for his pallor and the coldness of his hands. It was impossible to understand women!

In the silence of the vaults of the cathedral, Ginny thought he was still hearing the deafening noise of the wheels on the cobblestones. Just came in, fell to his knees and covered his ears with his hands to get rid of the echo the rattle of the wheel. Some time passed before he realized that what he heard was the beating of his own heart, which continued producing in hammer blows to the temple of pain. What was happening? He had felt fine this morning, maybe a little tired ... And now he could barely control his thoughts. The heat ... if I could overcome it ... if I had not done to please Conchita glass of soda that was offered, not now feel such nausea.

I did not know how long he had there, crouched on his knees, his head resting on a stool. Was it an hour or just a few minutes? Finally something of the serenity of the old cathedral, which for years had kept in place by catering to all who needed shelter, seemed to break into the troubled mind of the young. Ginny lifted her head with an effort and saw the altar that glowed from the lights of the candles at a great distance, as he thought, from where she knelt. Candles ... all the light coming from the candles whose flames wavered and waved to emerge in bright beam. Ah, felt really bad, he should not have raised their heads! Everything was spinning around, even the floor. As if he were seasick on board after having spent much time surfing. Ginny gasped and closed his eyes hoping that the strange malaise disappeared, but was getting worse. The sound of a thud made him open his eyes again and could see a piece of falling plaster and candles that were shaky. At the same time screams were heard outside the temple. The primary fear had been trying to contain, finally erupted in a cry: Earthquake!

Head still hurt but the pain, nausea and dizziness disappeared

swept by the survival instinct. Like any human being who feels trapped and terrified, got jumped with rapid pulse and heart popping chest. Escape! Run away! Panicked, gasping, sobbing loudly, he stumbled toward the door. She was sure that the church is going to fall over ...

"It is the punishment for my sins! I am dying !...»

I thought I heard a voice calling her by name: Ginny, Ginny! Naturally, it was the product of his imagination. The dazzling sunlight to reach the heavy doors that had entered a while ago. Just crossed them, heard the ominous sound of the huge spider that fell precipitously to the ground.

Entangled in long skirts, Ginny was about to roll on the floor. Already falling and screaming felt a violent blow on the head and utter darkness fell upon her.

Folks would say, shaking his head after he had been one of the worst earthquake they had experienced. Earthquakes are frequent in Gibara as in many parts of Cuba and the villagers already had experience ...

"Well, my friend, I am glad to know. The truth is I spent hellish moments. Do you often have victims?

Andre Delery, who had met some of their relationships on board by looking at the harbor the way to travel to Havana, he had gone with them in a tavern at the wharf. It was too hot to try to return home in full sun and, moreover, was still upset with his mistress the night before had refused to introduce some variations in their amorous ravings. Damn it! I knew there was no prude, it was too uninhibited for it ... But something was eating the recently ... I should find out what it was. During the conversation he had with the captain of the local volunteers, he had thought about whether your blood witch burning would not be willing to a variant of the orgy she had proposed last night. Perhaps her with two men? I was thinking when the first tremor of the earthquake brought him back to reality.

"It's nothing ... We're used to ...

The mustachioed captain had continued drinking and talking quietly, inviting others to do the same. The captain had not taken long to discover that the French-Creole, sympathized with the cause of the Spanish and was also a friend and disciple of the famous fencing master Pepe Llulla. And everyone knew it would attract Llulla Pepe Cuban emigres friends of the rebels to cash them off one by one.

Carrillo captain offered him a cigar to his new friend and lit it ostentatiously. Then he said yes, sometimes, the earthquakes caused some casualties. In general elderly dying of foreigners who were scared or panic.

"I can usually predict when it will produce one of these earthquakes. Is warmer than usual and the air seems to stop. You have to see the animals ... They always know!

Shortly after stumbling out of the tavern and took the rough road leading to the villa, amicably discussing whether or not a horse would come.

"You have been kind enough to invite me to dinner with his lovely wife, lovely imagine from the description I made of it, so I'll provide the horses.

Andre was hesitating whether to accept or not, when his eyes fell upon a group of people concentrated around what looked like a wrecked vehicle.

- Has something happened?

The master frowned, and, craning his neck, he turned to his companion to tell fatalistic air:

"An unfortunate accident ... But these things happen ... Animals seem to get crazy before the shaking starts. The horse must have run amok.

The vehicle, apparently one of those rare cars that the Cubans called flyers, had fallen under the stone bridge crossing a stream. Judging by the exclamations of the people who watched the scene crossing themselves, the passengers had survived.

Captain Carrillo, resuming his military bearing, was elbowed his

way through the crowd, making a gesture to Andre to follow him.
"For the clothing looks like a foreigner. Maybe some visitors arrive by boat.

Fortunately for viewers of sensitive soul, there was little they could see of the head of the woman trapped under the wheels of the car and the box: only a puddle of blood soaking the livery of a young man lying beside the carriage with eyes open and fixed broken neck.

- Poor boy! Muttered a lady who was in the crowd.

But the woman was or what was left of Andre, whom she looked hypnotized. Yes, the clothes he wore were those of a foreigner, as Captain Carrillo had assumed correctly. A pale green gown trimmed with darker ribbons that matched her eyes. A beautiful and elegant dress she had bought himself thinking about a determined woman. Ginny's dress, my God! Andre was deathly pale. Ginny!

Quite naturally he came to fetch him. It was typical of her to have a whim to go out for a ride to the hottest time of the day, leaving the pleasant coolness of the town. Were these caprices of his who had become the almost perfect lover. The would miss, he thought bitterly Andre ... Do not have it at your side to get to Havana, his plans changed a bit. I had thought boast of having a clandestine love to serve him as a smokescreen.

Now, Ginny, would have to adopt other tactics. The truth is not the first time I had to change plans at the last minute ...

- What a shame! I think it's better to be alert to the appropriate authorities. Will you come with me or would you prefer that we meet at dinner?

Andre had planned to introduce the master Carrillo Ginny. I had planned how to set the scene and how to direct it through the night. Ginny had refused to share it with Conchita but could accept sharing a bed with another man. Now could never know how she would react. C'est la guerre ...

"I'll meet you later ... I prefer to go change, has been a long day ...

It was not worth saying anything to the master Carrillo. While regretting that the girl had died and how he had died, was far more concerned about himself. There was no reason to be involved in the matter. Would like if I knew nothing and pick up his clothes in the town. I would say it had obtained passage for himself and his wife in a ship going that night to Havana. That would be it.

Chapter 19

In the hottest time of year, close to the harvest. The huge sugar mills were working constantly, sweet syrup would flow uninterrupted through the tubes to be dried and become the prized white crystal that would fill the "White Train Derosne" huge boxes of imported timber. Below the drying lasts would be receptacles for raw sugar. The smells would condense in the atmosphere warm and calm ... The smell of syrup and molasses which was produced with the spirit which is distilled in most of the mills.

During that season the wives and daughters of the owners of the mills, always used to lead a charmed life, not visited the plantations preferring to stay in cooler climates. Some, like the family of Julian Zulueta, barely knew their farms. Only Julian's daughter, who had remained unmarried, accompanied him everywhere assuming the duties of host. Tall, lean and dry, had grown comfortable sharing the world of men, always putting in place, listening to everything and with lasting cloth embroidery in her lap without anyone had ever seen give a stitch. It was said that Mary Philippa knew so much sugar and politics as any man in this world and its surroundings, and it was a pity there was not born a man. Even liked the snuff and spirits. Those who visited the palace of the Zulueta, were always sure to find a table beautifully set, where no detail or refinement had been left to chance.

However it was not common visitors arrived in time to harvest. Zulueta, who had always relied on her daughter like a boy or one of its partners, felt compelled to explain the reason why these people had been invited especially to spend some time with them.

"It's to please the captain-general and to satisfy my curiosity. It is possible that you might get something out of the woman, dear. She married the youngest of the Two Holy. Remember him? He was a boy unable to settle down. At one time sought the hand of your sister but I was not willing to marry such an irresponsible and gave me the right time.

Mary Philippa was sitting quietly with her embroidery in her lap, looking at his father who walked about the room and was distracted by the window as if he had forgotten what he had been talking. She knew. The father was only his thoughts. His brown eyes sparkled. It was the smartest man she had known. There was more to see how he started and where it had come! It was the richest and most powerful man in Cuba. More now that Miguel Aldama fool, had gone so openly in support of the rebels. Aldama was now living in exile in the cold New York and its beautiful palace in Havana had been torched by an angry crowd. While his father ... His father had learned from the first moment what would happen and what was the side that would stay in power. His thin fingers stretched over the seam. He trusted her. He spoke more freely than their own brothers who spent more time with your loved ones and the game that serve the plantation that she was the nurse, if she had been born male!

After returning to light his cigarette, pompous Julian resumed his speech as if it had never stopped.

"As for our other guest, is more of a mystery. He married the widow Dos Santos, making Mrs. Allen ... That told us. Now their way of planting it.

- That left field?

By observing the contemptuous gaze of his brown eyes, the father could not help but regret leaving her once again become a spinster. He had beautiful eyes like the mother, his first wife. He may have married but was too stubborn, always head stuck in books, determined to know how to handle the business, always asking questions ... At first he had been pleased, taking the thing with

some humor in the hope that their children were ashamed and take up more of their interests. After a while she became used to talk only with Philippa and Mary, at that point, she was the only one, besides himself, who knew how business went.

- Have not even own ingenuity! "Said Maria Felipa passionately, leaning slightly forward in his chair. If it was not because we have the courtesy to allow them to send the cane here ...

Don Julian shook his cigar.

"Well, well ... It was an arrangement made long ago. You know that I honor my word. What I ask is that the friend observes Allen. Don Francisco, his grandfather, is one of the richest men in Mexico, a partner in a property of the Queen Mother. That's what I understand. Other than that owns several thousand acres in the province of Camagüey.

Mr. Zulueta paused significantly. The daughter shook her head and bit his lip as he continued watching.

"It was once a plantation, one of the richest. I recently started to import cattle from Florida and Mexico as I have said. It is a dangerous area these days, infested with rebels who get everywhere. However, when Don Francisco was presented in Havana calling for a pass, I persuaded the Governor to grant it. Don Francisco has important interests in Spain. It can be helpful to have something to thank me.

Philippa Mary's smile was just a stretch of fairly thin lips and faded on its own. When she smiled she looked more like his father. His keen mind had already grasped perfectly what the father was up by inviting the grandson and heir of Don Francisco with his wife if his wife was traveling towards the footsteps of his grandfather. No doubt his father would be making appropriate inquiries by telegraph, this wonderful device! Meanwhile, she would ensure that visitors feel welcomed and prolong his stay all that was necessary. His father was smarter than anyone else, brilliant and thoughtful ... So the governors controlled up one after another passed through Cuba. Therefore, neither the unstable

Spanish governments dared to contradict his will. That same idiot cousin who had tried offering the olive branch to the rebels, had discovered that their purposes were beyond the possible.

Determined not to waste time, Maria Felipa stood amid the rustle of her petticoat taffeta skirt covered by bombazine outmoded. I knew who said that he dressed as a housekeeper or maid. Those empty-headed women are not employed more than his hair and clothes! At least the men appreciated his intelligence. Even the contemporaries of his father treated her with respect and sometimes reached to ask your opinion. Its dark image was reflected in a mirror and turned away from him. The appearances were not eternal ...

"I think you better go and warn the servants. I guess I will be here at any time. Is not that right, Dad?

The prize was a smile and a look of relief.

"I'm sure you'll make things right. I know I can always count on you.

Despite the stifling heat and humidity of the perfumed night, Anne had cold hands, shaking, and was biting his lips as if to give them some color. She sat up in bed, stiff, when Steven went to her. The room light still on, as if you needed to give him some company. A leather-bound book was lying open beside her. He had dropped when he started to get bored of it. What was he doing still awake? He had retired for over two hours, saying he was exhausted from the trip.

Steven frowned fearing she was about to fall ill. For Christ! What was happening? Was he sulking because he had taken so long to get to bed? The first words she uttered in an anguished whisper, quickly attracted him next to his bed with his face contorted.

- What ... Why you ask? Oh, God, Steve!, Was it prudent? I had forgotten until I saw her, that old bitter, look at me with his strange eyes ... I had forgotten how dangerous these people are. They could

kill us both and nobody would know. Why do you think there are no other guests? Why are we alone? I'm afraid ...

- Relax, Ana! If you fall into hysterics, I'll slap forced to see and you'll have to give explanations of the marks, you hear? Recóbrate and tell me what's troubling you. For Christ! ... A few hours ago were espinazo with the prospect of being here ...

Steven was impatient, he spoke without the slightest sympathy or desire to understand. Anne sobbed getting his knuckles on the mouth as children, seeing that his eyes darkened ominously. Oh, why not try to understand it Steven? He did not know these people as he knew it ... It was true, as he had just pointed out, had not said anything about them when dazzled by the invitation that, on letterhead of gold, they had handed the captain-general himself. Until you reach the plantation, had not had time to think about anything except the man at her side and that the adventure had begun together, probably would keep them together forever.

That night Anna dark brown hair fell loose in the back. It had been fastened with a velvet ribbon that Hanina. Her big eyes were full of tears. Steven sighed. Damn! No sense starting a fight with her. Anna had arrived there and, as stated by the loquacious Mr. Zulueta, they would have to travel a great distance together. Best to find out what was what had her so upset.

Steven appealed to his ability to patiently and said cautiously: "I regret having lost my temper with you. But it's true what I told you that is not the time to fall into hysterics. Why not try to calm down and tell me what has you so scared? And try to talk quietly. The walls have ears and open windows too!

The significant look that Steven went to the barred window, shaded by an old lime tree, which so frightened Anna began to whisper. After a while, when Steven turned off the lamp that was next to the bed, lying beside her, took her in his arms, he felt better. And safer ... Stephen had promised at the outset that would not let anything happen to him. Is not that enough?

"I thought she was going to be here. I should have known ... It is

the shadow of his father ... He has a heart of stone ... When Ali died ... God, I still remember the look on his face at the funeral! She was veiled, but under the veil you could see the smile. Let me see that he was smiling. When he gave me his condolences, not hide his voice with joy. And squeezed my hands so I left them sore. She had intended to Alonso ... He himself told me. But Ali had asked for the hand of his sister Maria Felipa Innocence and got the father to reject him. She never forgave him although they had been childhood friends.

The words came out of his mouth hurriedly in his anxiety to be heard. If he had the patience to listen ...

-Ana ...

- No, please, please, Stephen! Let me tell you everything my way. You have to know what they are. You know it is said that Julian gave money to murder Prim in Madrid? His power and influence even come to Spain. And even the United States as you yourself have seen. The bullet that struck your father was addressed to me. Do you remember the conversation at the table about the telegraph and its uses? I caught the look she gave me ... we drove the two. I know what that look meant, Stephen. Suppose you find out that we are not married ... Suppose ...

- Why waste time going to make assumptions? If they find out that I'm married to someone else, say he was only protecting your good name and honor, saying they are married.

"Then I will speculate on the reason for your trip.

"I've told them the reason was back-.se impatient with the constant repetition of foreboding. I'm here on business. That's all. I am concerned about the fate that my grandfather was able to run ...

Which is quite true. And I might be interested in purchasing your plantation ... So limit yourself to take your precious eyes wide open and mouth shut and let me answer the questions.

Ana, who had come to know how to be Steven, reluctantly surrendered. I was a little scared and was not too sure about him. It was what she needed. A strong man, good looking, great lover and

above all, rich. It should be her husband!

Ana incoherent murmuring let him open her nightgown and lightweight, huddling against him, her breasts pressed warm on his bare chest. She knew how to give pleasure in a thousand ways that witch of a wife would never have dreamed. Began breathing shallowly while his hand gripped him rather abruptly. Oh, God! How he loved to treat her like a whore!

For the rest of the night, it was easy to replace fear with lust. But the next morning Anna fears were renewed by a number of small clues. Steven had risen early and was not on her side when she finally awoke. At first I had no idea where he had gone. The black slave who sent him to attend her, just shook his head at their questions pretending, thought Anne, not knowing anything. His expression showed only bovine surprise when he said he wanted to take a bath. Steven had always insisted on the need to sit continuously bathing. Cuban women were not too attached to bathroom and sometimes preferred Ana washed with a wet towel. But now the bathroom it would save time. Do not want to meet Mary Philippa, with her eyes that scrutinized her tongue permanently or snake. If I could delay the meeting until noon, maybe Steven was already back. Where had he gone?

Ana was submerged in the copper vat that had provided so long as he could. When the water was almost cold and the fingers had begun to amoratársele, allowed to dry in the silent girl, biting her lip with impatience. I would back him. Maybe he had not left the house at any time. He with his host waiting for her to come down.
- What is going to be the mistress?

The amber-colored dress. Yes, that ...

He was one of the costumes that best suited him. Perhaps more appropriate for the city, but be as attractive as possible to make you feel better.

Someone knocked on the door and Ana raised her spirits. Thank God! I was back!

"Go ...

Then he thought he should have taken into account that Steven had not called so ceremoniously. Entered without a completed and you have dark blue eyes to see her naked and watch the blush covered his pink skin. Ana pursed his lips in a gesture of reproach as he waited for the door opened. But her lover was not coming. It was Maria Felipa.

"Forgive the intrusion. But my father and I were worried thinking you might have fallen ill. This is the worst time to be traveling. The opaque eyes of Mary Philippa got stuck in the sensual body of Anne, while noting the flush bit grainy which covered her face, blurring her beauty.

"I ... I ...

Philippa Mary Anne tried to ignore that stumbled with words. What a silly woman and simple, thought Maria Felipa with contempt. I had to offer more than a beautiful woman who would fill out fading as fat. Why are men attracted to such women? What was it that was called lust and that made them mad and they alike? Philippa Mary went to the window with his stiff and wiry figure, giving you time to Ana to engage in the towel. When he turned back into the room, her back to the light.

Then he gestured to the fearful slave slipped out of the room. For a moment doubted whether Ana Maria Felipa had heard his question about where was Stephen.

"That's one reason why I allowed myself to bother.

The sarcastic tone of voice of Mary Philippa made her seem such weak excuses. Ana asked why he hesitated to upset the way, choosing his words carefully. Maria Felipa continued dry, deadpan tone:

"Mr. Allen, or would it be more correct to call Mr. Morgan?, Has been with my father most of the morning. They had received some news from his grandfather ... On the advice of my father, decided to leave immediately, taking the escort of the heathen soldiers who accompanied you here. I told him I would tell you.

He paused to give time for Anna to catch her breath and then said

without giving much importance as that, naturally, Mrs. Dos Santos would be a welcome guest for as long as he wished. Ana waited calmly broke into tears and tirades. Maria Felipa had anticipated the pleasure of witnessing the attack of hysteria that would bitch when Dos Santos volunteered

Chapter 20

During the two weeks following Steven Morgan sometimes wondered how he would have fixed Ana After erased from his mind. Don Julian Zulueta, as he had the opportunity to see, was a smart man. Civilized enough not to do with anything other than sending Ana with his parents. Steven had more important things to think about, among others, The devil had happened to his grandfather.

To his surprise there was not much he had said Julian. He could only speculate.

"Your grandfather and I are old friends, friends for reasons of interest. I met him in Spain. Did you know that? Forgive me, but before talking frankly to you, had to be sure that you were actually the grandson of Don Francisco. Do you understand my position? Cautiously, Steven admitted that he understood the attitude of Don Julian, sharp and dull man, whose sharp eyes belied his permanent smile. Julian contemptuously handed him the telegram.

"I used the telegraph amazing invention that!, And I can learn many interesting things. You actually manage to make a name in the business world, young man! Railways ... silver mines ... But apart from the natural interest in finding out what happened to his grandfather ... What kind of business you have brought to Cuba? The island is torn by strife, almost a civil war ...

Steven caught the penetrating gaze of his host and shrugged.

"I'm especially interested in land. In the midst of a civil war is possible to buy land at low prices. Sugar plantations ... coffee ... I understand that the interests of my grandfather in this country, including livestock. Despite his age, my grandfather is still a very

astute man of business. I can assure you, sir, but I'm interested to make money here, I have no intention of creating a small kingdom like Cuba, some time ago, did my unfortunate countryman, Colonel Crittenden.

Don Julian smiled graciously, shaking his head.

- Oh, yes, it's a wise position! It's a shame that some of his compatriots do not share your position, sir. We can only hope that his government would continue to adopt the policy enunciated by Secretary of State, Mr. Hamilton Fish.

If Steven was waiting to see where I wanted to get Julian did not have to wait too. Absent-mindedly, forcing you to keep enjoying the copious breakfast, Zulueta asked about the health of his father.

-Senator from California, I understand ... A man who also likes to invest in various projects, according to what is said ... What a pity! I hope he is recovering satisfactorily from his wound ...

"If you know that too must know that supposed I had left Mexico with Ana" thought Steven worried though his face remained impassive.

"The last thing I heard is that it is pretty good. My wife stayed with him naturally.

What was not so natural was that he was traveling with his mistress by passage through his wife, he thought Steven. But deuce take it, would that Zulueta draw their own conclusions. He was smart enough in that area.

Apropos of nothing, the old man dropped the subject and spoke again of Don Francisco.

"Well, you must forgive an old forgetful ... We were talking about his grandfather, his grandfather. I was also worried about their safety in rebel zone, I did some research ... Which makes me think that although seems fine, it would not hurt you were looking for him. I can arrange the trip if you're willing to leave immediately. The lieutenant and the soldiers who escorted him to you here, leave at noon to Camaguey. It is now a relatively safe, since the general good of our captain Agramonte exterminated, as you must

know, was one of the most important rebel leaders. For more surprise, Julian taught several maps which plainly showed how little was the territory controlled by the rebels. The Spanish soldiers were disciplined, were well organized and were kept under control. The last harvest had reached record highs despite the hostilities. 'Why I will be telling you this?' Steven asked while thinking he was almost all the information that Bishop wanted ... Why go on spinning? But even with that idea in his head, Steven realized that his mind was much faster and I was feeling the excitement that always heralded moments of danger. Before Julian finished his speech - was meant as a lesson? - Steven had already decided to leave for Camagüey in search of his grandfather, but also in order to find out what the hell was really happening in Cuba.

"The quickest and safest Camagüey reach is by boat. Cardenas is one waiting at the soldiers. Also take a load of rum made here. So ... Good luck! Give my memories of his grandfather and tell him that if there is anything I can do for him will be honored to oblige. The ubiquitous and helpful Steven M. Zulueta left very worried. Occasionally the question was spinning in my head: You have not been too helpful Mr? What was the secret that he hid his gentle smile? What was more worried that Steven was Zulueta had much time to maneuver while he was locked in that little boat paunchy and slow, rather than sail the waters, seemed to hang heavily over them. The Spanish lieutenant, a young man named De Marco, spent most of the time they were together telling the atrocities that made the rebels or commenting on the recent victories of the Spanish. Man boasted of being the slave of his career. Plausible attitude, told Steven, apologizing to follow the conversation when they tired of listening to their insipid stories ... And he walked on deck to scan the horizon looking from time to time how fast the other boats left more gracefully back, waving the flags of routine. Once he saw a clipper from a distance. He must be one of the ships of the Line Lady. It was then that I remember so fiercely that

he had tried to avoid, he was struck without his having time to notice. Ginny ... green-eyed woman who had once been his ... Virginia Brandon Morgan, his wife. Or as was his ex-wife? Damn it and damn well his own stubborn arrogance! The wife who he really wanted, was as he had tried to make it? It was Ginny who should have been brought here instead of Ginny Anne that, although sometimes put him angry to the point of wanting to strangle her, I had never boring, never ceased to attract ... It was the only woman he had never lower our guard and, worse, who never could forget. Since its first meeting had to be capable to distract and irritate him at once and since then ...

Swore to himself, Steven moved away from the railing. The destruction took it! Your little witch, stubborn and proud! As soon as discontinued their findings would in Cuba, Mexico would go right to y. .. Poor as she was not waiting there! ... No way ... As much as Ginny tried desperately to remove the head, his instincts more than his reason, had fallen into a deep unease that made him bite his lips wanting to be him who directed the infected ship. Would do better than the captain, that old man who should have retired long ago. Spent two weeks at sea and was not yet in sight Nuevitas port where it already should have arrived. At the slightest storm sought the shelter of a cove where, above, were not allowed to disembark. All of which made her think that Zulueta bitterly Steven had wanted to give a lesson in patience, or simply get rid of it. Whatever the intentions of the good lord, Steven was left with little choice but to wait ...

Ana Dos Santos was also waiting, though he knew not what. But I felt that way! As the puppy caught in a noose hanging from the knife or bullet that stops with him, I knew something was about to happen. Something bad was planned against it.

He had gotten hysterical as the cynical Maria Felipa had anticipated. He had been bedridden with a passing mood Steven

visceral hatred for leaving her so so vile in the hands of these people smiling and overly attentive to the visceral fear of being left alone and helpless. When the doctor who had come to attend to being gone, appeared in the room Mary Philippa to speak harshly of what was the pride and spiritual strength.

-Sorry to be so harsh to speak, but it is women like you that emboldens men to trample them. He had married before you bring her here as his traveling companion, is not it? Not even, I bet, had spoken of marriage ... So what you expected?

Sob at the contents of Anna, the old growled contemptuously:

- I thought so! And you stooped to accompany him as his lover. Do not know what would happen? I know many men of his ilk ...

Easily emerge from what has been achieved, for little money and with little effort, once they start to get bored. Bah! If you can not do without a man in bed, why not choose one that is older than you and that question right?

The suggestion brought out her Anne of self-pity to scream in a fit of rage:

- How dare you talk like that, especially knowing that I'm forced to be his guest and share your roof? You always hated me, do not think you do not know. Since Alonso decided to marry me!

- Poor fool! Do you think it was Alonso who chose her as his wife?

It was his father, with an eye on the dowry. On the same Alonso, what more insubstantial dandy! Do you really think I want to? No, dear, at all. If I stayed single was not for lack of proposals. It was my own choice, to be mistress of my destiny. With the money he has my father, could have chosen the man who had wanted while also having him. How I despise stupidity, in both men and women! That said, with a last look of displeasure, Mario Felipe left the room. When they met, was Anne, who had regained some of their pride, who initiated the conversation.

-You may be right, "he sighed in what he says about men.

Ana, who had recovered something of his good sense, she was determined to cultivate the friendship of Mary Philippa, no matter

the cost. After all there was no other woman I talk to these surroundings and Julian was out or locked in his office with the foremen. Anne was dying of boredom ... bored to death. She had to get there. But how and where to go would be go ...

Anna sighed.

I hoped that Steve would tell me what could be done with the planting. I can not handle it, though. And my father made me promise to not sell to anyone outside the family. What was I doing then?

"Now you're talking as if he had recovered a little common sense. Maria Felipa was smoking one of the small cigarettes made expressly for her at a factory of his father. The smoke hung in curls around the room. He seemed to enjoy playing the role of mentor to Anne, at least at that time.

I do not see why it can not handle the finances yourself unless you are very coming down. Or not running ... If I were you, I seek a man. It's what you usually do, right? A man on whom to lean, a man with whom he could perform in public ...

"But ... -Anne began hinting a protest.

The old cut it bluntly:

"No matter. I'm sure you'll get it. My father expected one of these days a visit from a man as you need. He is a handsome, bright beau ... like his ex-lover. Tell me about your wife ...

- What? Who ...?

- Please! No need to be put to stutter. I ask that I speak of Mrs. Morgan. I understand that is called Virginia. What kind of woman is she?

As gates that open, Ana could finally allow it to explode all the hatred and resentment for so long would have been hidden in the depths of his soul. Virginia Morgan spoke of his background, had been Ginny Brandon, the scandal that always surrounded his name and his public affairs with other men. She also told of Ginny's father, his stepmother and another family scandal that had erupted before the astonished eyes of all New Orleans, just days before

Steven and she departed. Until he had finished speaking, Ana did not think to ask why he had chosen Maria Felipa precisely this topic for questions. All I knew is that he felt better! ... Much better!

Later, when Maria Felipa, a beaming smile, told his father all the information he had brought to Anne, he also smiled.

I do not know what to do without you, girl. You are my workmanship! Much more than these vague of your brothers! "I was elated. Well, well, I hope we know more when our guest. I'm glad he has been concerned to find out where I was at this time of year. It is a very clever man. A man of intelligence and resources. He deserves the extravagant fees they pay him. Do you think that when you are ready to leave for Havana, asked to escort Mrs. Dos Santos there?

"She's stupid and boring. Hard to have a conversation with her," grunted Mary Philippa, trying to hide the pleasure he had provided compliments of his father. I'm sure he'll find another guard in Havana if Mr. Delery, our expected guest, finds it boring after a while.

Andre Delery, after disembarking in Matanzas, arrived this weekend to the estate Alaya. Ana felt hopeless ... Among all men the world had to be him ... But soon his eyes began to glow with indignation. Why did that man to fear? She had done nothing, had been used as a puppet. No, it was Steven Morgan which would have to be careful, especially Delery reputedly fearsome swordsman. "He's right", thought he saw now how Anna escaped this. Was much that she had admitted to Mary Philippa, to avoid being incriminated herself. Was it possible that such Delery bring fresh news of New Orleans.

Ana looked at her reflection in the mirror and decided that he looks good. Therefore began to think about dinner time and his meeting with Mr. Delery that, after all, was also a very handsome man. Was not he who had challenged to a duel to the poor Senator

Brandon? "A man who bears the risk on their backs," Steven told someone some time. One of the gossipy friends of the owner. The phrase was also valid for this Mr. Delery, thought Anna, giving a hint of color on the lips. Then she smiled to herself. "I have been wondering. We'll see how it is and if he likes me or not. "A good way to get revenge on the man who had left here, without saying a word or leave any message, it would be mistress of the newcomer. It was even possible that Andre Delery would offer to escort her back to New Orleans, which he preferred to move to Mexico with his parents. Was it possible that Stephen went to Mexico after she ... I wish so much spitting in the face, humiliating him in his arrogance, saying he did not want to see anymore!

Chapter 21

Tired of protective custody and helpful overzealous Lieutenant De Marco and his men to put it in some way, Steven decided to get rid of them had just landed in the natural bay of Nuevitas. But unfortunately, the lieutenant did not share his opinion. There was no decent restaurant around Nuevitas, only brothels ... It was dark and would not allow a foreign visitor to travel alone at night to Camaguey.

- No, no, sir! No way! ... There are rebel fighters everywhere. Sometimes in our own cities ... It is also possible that our headquarters has heard from her grandfather. For security reasons, our garrison is under orders to stay in constant contact with Mr. Allen. Tomorrow will arrange an armed escort to accompany him. The dark and gloomy night, fierce winds and rain that hung in the air, the need to obtain the information that the lieutenant had promised and what was left of their ability to control himself, allowed Steven to keep a smile on lips stolid soldier and thank the trouble you took for him.

One more night, thought Steven. With a caustic smile that the guard could not see in the dark, Steven recalled the times when faced with a similar delay its temperamental nature had

overflowed. It was now more cautious. No sense on a night like that, get out alone in a strange country which knew almost nothing. Ana would have served as a guide and a pretext to justify his stay in Cuba. But for some reason had not yet been uncovered, had managed to separate them. You ever find out. For now accepting Steven had caught so naturally adapt to their plans and also accept the reasons that gave weak to prevent it even saying goodbye, his supposed wife.

Some lights began to currencies in the damp night. There was the neighing of horses and the guitar strumming of guitar strings out of tune. A wall appeared before them and heard the sentry's challenge peremptorily.

"Well," said Lt. without the need, we are! The shacks are no big deal as you can imagine. But, at least, the accommodation of the officers is clean and there's always one or two rooms free. Go, sir, to get rid of this damn wind. A hot meal and a glass or two of wine will come in handy, right?

Late at night he finally dumped torrential rain that left puddles covered the ground and tore all the smells fertile clay soil that had hidden and thirsty. So Steven had time to order in your mind how much he had learned. The young lieutenant was a man of his word. There was hot food served in abundance, cheap red wine, the unfailing spirit and, to a young woman and acceptably handsome to share his bed.

Fortunately, given the unwillingness of mind that Steven had that night for certain things, she had fallen asleep just had satisfied his wish and now Steven, lay on his back, arms folded behind his head, listening to the quiet breathing the girl and the noise of the storm that was going away. If all went well, the next day would be way to Camaguey, accompanied of course by the promised escort ... But then ...

It appears that Steven was not the only person who cared for Don Francisco Alvarado. That was probably the reason why Julian Zulueta had dealt so diligently sending it to the area. As far as he

could gather from his conversation with the couple stiff charge of the garrison, no one was sure if Don Francisco was a prisoner of the rebels, his guest or a staunch supporter of them, ready to offer their support.

The staff had tried to talk with the best touch.

"We have orders to take every consideration to Mr. Alvarado. Should I call it Marquis? ... He insisted that he did not use the title. Be that as it is a very delicate situation. To tell the truth I do not know what to do. As you have seen we have received some messages written in the handwriting of Mr. Allen. But you could also see what are those short and ambiguous messages. It's in rebel zone and I have not been able to send a detachment to seek to avoid endangering his life. For this region have raised all in arms over what they call the "murder" of Agramonte. Do you realize what position am I in?

Steven was given acutely aware. As much as was given of their own situation. He had been sent there to get to his grandfather. To find him and take him out of the country, before they put the Spanish government in an embarrassing situation.

Unfortunately, neither the general nor captain Julian Zulueta had no idea what they were arrogance and stubbornness of Don Francisco. Neither the extent it was used by the Marquis of Santillana to do things as and when it occurred. Steven brow furrowed darkly in the dark of night, recalling how many times they had crashed his grandfather and himself. You would have accompanied his guard, Jaime? The latest and laconic lines she had received from him, had been delivered in New Orleans some months ago and did not say much, apart from announcing that he was going to Cuba to personally ensure their interests. But as far as Steven was able to imagine, it was possible that those "interests" include active participation in the rebellion against the Spanish government.

With open eyes in the darkness, Steven recalled other times and other countries ... He himself was now the "rebel" ... And not just

in the eyes of the French authorities but to those of his own grandfather. Don Francisco had always maintained the authority of established governments and, himself of Spanish birth, could not be skeptical about what side were his sympathies. And yet ... "How is it that I did not know he owned property in Cuba? Had ever mentioning it. "Steven was unable to reach any conclusion. When the girl lying beside him began to sigh and stretch, leaning her rounded belly against him, began to caress her body wet and inviting, almost absently. Soon would come the morning and the answers she was looking for. The night was the night and if he could not sleep in this world there were still ways to pass the time pleasantly. As he had learned to do over the years he lived a day, Steven planned to close his mind to anything other than the pleasure of the moment.

At the same time but in another place, Ginny was trapped by the horrors of a nightmare. He dreamed he was dead and, while she had been buried alive. After they had taken from the tomb and had been wrapped in a black shroud was spinning round and round the body to cover her face and eyes. "How can I be dead and yet I know what's going on?" He thought to himself. "And if I'm alive, why am I so still, so stiff?" I could hear distant voices but wrapped in the shroud, do not recognize anyone or anything.

- It seems that moves!

"He's still unconscious, do not you see? In any case he said he was not allowed to move.

"You must sleep ... sleep ... sleep.

The last word, spoken with an accent, continued to resonate in the back of his mind, each time more quietly, until they vanished altogether. Only then was fully aware that Ginny was all a horrible dream and would wake up soon. That's at least what he thought at that time. After he was given a sedative and sleep grew deeper and deeper until he could not hear anything or think anything or be

anything.

How strange! Getting work close to the fullness of consciousness to fall gradually after again into a lethargic state could not do nothing but let himself down in a spiral to the bottom of an abyss, weightless, despite the now familiar feeling of stiffness your body. "I guess I'm getting used to the mortise ..." pondered, but even that thought scared her already.

He had fallen into a pleasant dream, a sort of limbo, but the voices that began to recognize and to distinguish, were becoming stronger and bothered him.

- Why not wake up? It is not normal ...

"Stay calm ... look, it begins to move again. Completely awake when he sees fit. Do not understand what I explained?"

Were female voices, one younger than the other. Sometimes also mixed the voice of a man who sounded remotely familiar. It sometimes seemed that he spoke to her voice, not speaking of it over his head with other people. That voice was soft, caressing and awakened in her mind the images of darkness and away from the constant feeling of being wrapped in a black shroud.

He had lost track of time. I had the feeling of floating or flying, falling from time to time. But falls were always smooth, as if they were on cushions. What felt lighter! It was not difficult, even unpleasant, to remain in that state of semi-consciousness. But the day came when Ginny suddenly realized that she was not dead, nor sleeping, even dreaming. I was completely awake. Someone was quietly singing a sad song and it was something plaintive flamenco. The person who was singing in another room ... Their room was dark as pitch.

But could perceive everything. It was a strange feeling. Something like watching and listening from a hiding what they do and others say. Like being behind a wall with a crack that would let the sounds ... The wall of "Dream of a Summer Night" by Shakespeare. Maybe what she had thought it was a dream, it was partly true and, indeed, had given up for dead and had put in a

coffin, a black coffin ... "No, I prefer to be dreaming or dead buried alive!"

He must have said something or make some noise but the terror did his heart beat so hard that no one noticed. Suddenly he felt a hand touch and squeezed his. Some fingers strong, warm and soft brushed his forehead.

"Do not be afraid ... There is nothing to fear. I have been constantly by his side and always will be. Rest assured, my love. You have been very serious and far should not worry or let fear dominate if he feels the decline. Hold on to my hand, stick out ... Do not leave. Darling, never leave her!

Surely I was dreaming again. Her voice trembled with emotion listening. But it was a powerful voice-that-was sure belonged to a whole man. To someone she knew but could not locate. Ginny's fingers shook hands man offered him while trying to open my eyes without being able to achieve. He was still so dark ... Why ... why?

"I'm in a basement, right? Rats ...

- No, by God! Do not ever think that nonsense. You are not in a basement in any way. Are you in a good room, lying in a comfortable bed. At least I hope he looks comfortable ... Have you been very sick and must stay calm. Trust me, please.

- Am I in a coffin? Is that it? Have you thought someone was dead and buried me alive? I seem to remember ... Yes, I remember there was an earthquake, I was at church and started running, but I tripped, I fell and something fell on me.

"Do not think that ... Do not worry about anything now. Do you hear? It is now safe and well cared for. You have to rest and then explain everything, I promise. Drink now this, my dear.

He felt the cool edge of the cup on the lips and soft, warm liquid that fell in the mouth like honey. She was awake, awake! God! Why was everything so black, why he still looked like it was wrapped in a dark shroud?

- Is not opium, right? I could go through that again. I would kill myself. Are you a doctor? It seems ... Am I awake or is this part of

a dream?

I could hear her voice flowed. What a strange feeling! The voice was getting weaker and softer at times until it stopped completely and hear it again float, sinking more and more to sink again into the darkness and stay asleep.

A female voice said angrily:

- How can you tell? He has received too many shocks and has been comatose for too long. You yourself said that could be dangerous.

- Dear sister, the doctor's me! Do not worry. You have to recover some strength and in the meantime, I'll talk in their sleep. Thus preparing to go when it is fully conscious and able to accept it.

- Are you sure, Richard? I do not want to hurt you, you know ...

But how can you tell if it ...?

"I know. Please trust me. When having his children at his side, everything will go well. Have I ever failed instinct?

"No ... never. But, Richard, is that correct? You know I'm willing to do anything for you, anything to see you happy ... And happy to see her poor creature! But his ... the children's father, what can happen with their claims, with their feelings? It's not like you do not have those things in mind. I guess that's what worries me most. He laughed but then recovered gravity.

- Oh, Helen! My wise and wonderful, understanding and practical sister! Believe me, I have not stopped it all into account. And most especially the fact that he, the man whose feelings much you care, it is not interested in the least by these two poor creatures, nor is concerned for the feelings of the woman he married by force .

What kind of man is he who neglects his wife and makes public display of her lovers, one of which is even stepmother of the bride? He has not even bothered to know their children. No, he's traveling to Cuba with a young man who was once engaged. Are you going to blame my love for abandoning him? She no longer loves him. I am going to love me. Once we've completed our plan, we'll go together. We will live happy and you, the dearest and understanding of the sisters will visit us often, right? You'll love

become aunt!

The factions rather hard for women were relaxed somewhat, but continued speaking sternly:

"Really, I can not believe it's you, just you, the you're dreaming and you lost all your common sense. I have not agreed to take part in a plan so crazy. Not helping the abduction of these children ...

"It's not a kidnapping. You'll help to reunite a mother with her children. Will our children. Is not it a joke of destiny, logical joke however, since we are of the same blood?

Chapter 22

"But I can understand," she said, confused where I was and where I am now. Not what has happened. The last thing I remember ... he was a very hot day, very quiet ... Overwhelmed by the heat, I decided to go to church and the earthquake. Since then I think I've been dreaming. I dreamed I was dead, that I was buried alive and so could hear distant voices and not seeing anything. And now I'm awake? Is it too dark? I can not see but hear his voice familiar to me.

He shook his head and touched his hands. His forehead was wet and cold. It felt strange to her body and herself. Frightened asked - Why do not you say something? Who are you? I look familiar and strange at once. It's all very strange. I have been sick, right? What is wrong with me?

He shifted uneasily and realized that she was lying in a bed with clean sheets. The top sheet slipped from her shoulders and then realized he was naked. There was still a sense of unreality, of living a dream within a dream. A hand took hers and held it tight. This gesture is also familiar. Like the fresh lips landed on yours.

"My dear ... my beloved wife ... There is so much to explain! I will the explain. But promise me you'll stay calm and stay calm as I speak. Has long been seriously ill and you are still weak. You must not make any effort.

- But I do not understand! Who are you? I know his voice and you just called ... wife. You are not Steven ... His voice is like her but not Steven. He is not ... Why this confusion? Why can not I see? The hand holding hers pressed harder and the silence seemed to spread and vacillate between them, such as extending the calm after an explosion. Although seemed like ages, only took a few seconds between the anxious questions of her and calm response from him.

"I see, dear, I'll see soon ... I'm a doctor, you know? I assure you have no organic disease. The head injury was you got some brain pressure to yield. You semiconscious state, a sort of coma for several months. Please feel that you shake and there are no reason to. Do not you trust me? As I was saying, there is no physical reason whatsoever for you can not see. Not only am a doctor of bodies ... I am also a doctor of souls. I've spent years in the East, next to those saints who some call "gurus" or teachers, priests who are studying. Cures that the West would call miracles. If you think that now you can see, you have to try to know the reason. The analysis you are getting your mind. When that reason, deeply hidden behind your conscience, come to the surface, you will see again.

The panic caused Ginny clung more tightly to the hand holding hers. The words he had uttered so carefully, almost no sense to her now.

"I'm ... I'm blind! Oh, God! I'd rather be dead! I'm afraid ... I've always been afraid of the dark and now I feel it weighing on me like a velvet cushion that will not let me breathe ... I can not breathe ... Help me! ... Whoever you are, help me!

The voice that had so often heard in dreams, talking and comforting, she again addressed vigorously, interrupting their complaints broken.

"I can not help you unless you want to help yourself, you have to understand. You have to listen and trust me. If nothing else, you should know and be convinced that I love you. We've been

together before and that we'll be. Both in previous lives and the current, we were husband and wife. Listen and concentrate your mind in my voice ... Listen and closes his eyes. You're playing blind man's buff ... Do you remember when you played that game as a child? It is just that. We're playing and I will guide you and take you safely into the light. But you have to listen carefully to everything I say.

His cries for help were silenced as she clung ever more tightly to the hand holding hers and tried to stop her sobs. He focused his mind on the man's voice as he had requested. He needed his thoughts and his fingers to cling to something. As his voice, sweet and firm, was consoling, rousing the morass toward the mainland, it was calming, relaxing the tension and allowing the voice and hands of man wrap and be supported, providing both security needed.

- How do you get? "Asked shortly after the voice of the lady by the name of Helen. Are you using this I hear call mesmerism or magnetism? It has given me the impression of being a docile woman ... With this mop of hair ... And yet, it's amazing how calm you. You begin to really accept you as a husband? I hope, brother, you're not embarking on a dangerous and disappointing ... In a game that finished destrozándote the heart and making you shed many tears. In his delirium I heard the cry for this man who called Steven, her husband ...

"Not a real husband. He forced her to marry him by force, never has been true, has always made miserable. It's starting to get used to me, lean on me, trust me, need me. Do not you mind yourself? Come to love. When we leave here we will do together as husband and wife as a family. You'll see, suspicious!

Richard Avery, Lord Tynedale, smirked at his sister who, without returning the smile, bowed her head, pursing her lips. Helena Avery was much older than his brother and loved him with the passion of a mother. When he decided to become a doctor, was happy and proud. She remained unmarried, living with his parents

as Richard, in search of his fate, he traveled tirelessly for years, always exploring, in an endless search. Richard had an insatiable desire to know. Helena understood when it returned home saying that Western medicine just scratched the surface of the problems. The most lucid East had led to him understand what to them did not offer the slightest doubt: to heal the body, also had to know the hidden recesses of the minds. His father, Lord Tynedale, disagreed. Helena knew why. The reason was that his mother was born in the East, was a princess and heiress of a powerful kingdom. The guardians of the little girl she had once conspired to kill and supplant the other. It had been like a romantic adventure! The young English lord who went to work in the East India Company, crossed the border between Afghanistan and Persia, "controlled by Russia disguised as a merchant. By pure chance I had rescued the young princess at the hands of men who had abducted her to kill her. It was a very long history, some of whose episodes Helena rather not remember. But Richard was the work of his mother. Their horizons always seemed to be broader than those of Helena. What compelled the burning desire to travel, learn, to know other experiences, other lands, other cultures. Returning from one of his trips, said he had returned to announce he had been in Mecca, thus beginning the adventure of his conversion to Islam, the ancient religion of his mother.

Yes, thought Helen, Richard was certainly an extraordinary man. The type of man who never stands still, which is never willing to stay too long in one place. He had the gift therapeutic, that there was no doubt, and, had it wished, if he had become world famous. How strange it was that Richard, always so self-sufficient and monastic customs, had fallen hopelessly in love! Where would this sudden passion of everyone, including this woman? Helena, who had heard of its history, felt sorry for her. But what if this woman of whom his brother was so mad and passionately in love not reciprocated his feelings?

As for Ginny, had begun to feel he was in another world, living in

another dimension where time does not count, unable to distinguish the boundaries between the day and night. His only contact with life and reality were the different voices she heard about her, particularly the voice and hands of the man whom she called her husband, the man who was always at his side, sustaining, feeding and even reading to him. He spoke of his children-our children, he said, promising to meet them soon.

"Not much longer, darling. I know how you must be of impatient and I share your grief. But I promised you ...

- How can you promise me that? Although Steven, .. while Steven was still too busy to spend time, I'm sure that Don Francisco would never allow that away from him. You do not know. I learned to love, is an honorable man but is an autocrat. Are your grandchildren and he will insist on ... No, you do not know what he is saying!

He felt the pressure from her in the palm of your hand before hearing the encouraging response and somewhat mysterious.

"I ask only that you think I do not empty promises. Don Francisco ... well, I know Don Francisco. We are related. I think I can persuade him that the children belong to mothers.

On many occasions, Ginny did not seem real that she was the mother of twins. There were moments when it seemed that not even remember what it was herself. How long had not looked in a mirror smiling or frowning at his picture? What would mirror the mirror the next time she mentioned therein, if it ever could I? At first he terrified the darkness in which he lived. Especially since I could not help recalling the dark cell where he was tied once without the possibility of asking for help, with the terrifying feeling that something was slipping down his sweaty skin, in the midst of darkness ... darkness ... After a while, however, had no choice as possible, began to accept the fact that he could not see how with imagination.

- How are you? He asked one day to Richard Avery.

He took her hand and pressed it against his face, laughing softly.

- Finally the curiosity! It's a good sign! Use your touch and try to imagine, my love. Do not expect to see a handsome prince. But I look passable though I spent smallpox as a child I left some marks. Can you notice them?

"Yes, but that does not matter. What color are your eyes and hair?

"I'm fascinated ... My eyes are blue, dark blue. And my hair is black. They say I look like my father but perhaps I'm not as tall as he. But I'm taller than you, my little wife. You'll soon realize, when we go for walks together. Much time has passed since you left for a walk and you get into my gardens. They are very well designed and will be a great pleasure for me to describe it.

She leaned back, shaking his head.

- No! ... Es .. I still can not sit with me ...

He guessed his thoughts when he saw her panting and breathing heavily. And he spoke gently,

"You're afraid, is not it? It's natural. But you're staying in bed forever, depending only on the massage to prevent muscle atrophy you. Do not pass anything on the legs and you have to exercise. Now I am speaking in my capacity as doctor. I will be with you, beside you, and you will feel much better. You'll see.

"I've become a coward," said Ginny, feeling miserable and knew it was true. I noticed that he was looking and wondering what would be watching. Would have liked to cover his face with his hands, but he shook with the force.

"My dear, you are no coward in any way. You've gone through experiences that no other women have endured and have come out of them stronger. Now you will not let a temporary illness beat you.

When that evening refreshed, took a walk through the garden. Ginny wore a green silk dress which, he explained, matched her eyes. After all was not so bad, he thought. I felt the pebbles of the trails under the soles of his shoes as a child tied above the ankle, and the smell of orange blossoms and other exotic flowers floating in the air. Richard told that a high stone wall protecting his

privacy. When she asked him where he was arching his eyebrows properly, he said he was in Mexico.

Mexico! I had not imagined even had thought of asking before.

Ginny thought for a moment that everything had been arrested around, even breathing on his chest. "Mexico", was repeated once more and tried to guess whether they would be in Orizaba and Cordoba, where a breakaway group had formed a colony after the war. "It has come full circle, she thought, while he hummed with tears that would not have wanted to shed, to remember things in which I refused to think. She had said goodbye to Mexico many times ... And he always returned ... Was it fate?

He managed, who knows how to keep walking, always leaning on the arm of Richard who held firmly by the elbow. Should strive to prevent him realize that the revelation had produced a real shock.

- Are you tired, darling? Do you want to go home?

Ginny nodded. Ached all the muscles of the body unaccustomed to exercise. She had walked miles without getting tired, barefoot and in rags ... She who had danced after long hours, coupled with music that was not that of the waltzes, lancers and the Scottish dancing in the halls are civilized, but the Mexican country dances made to be danced outdoors. ..

A Ginny thought he was remembering the other person, a gypsy child who did not notice means to achieve their goals and win the man she wanted. Yes, at that time still believed in a happy ending! Without being able to help, thoughts flowed runaway with its load of bitterness ... Although Steven's would have continued to love, or at least wanting, now would not want. A Steven liked women fresh, charming and flawless. Once he had been mercilessly the brink of hell to cure what he called his addiction to opium. I would not have a blind wife. Never let him know what had happened! She leaned on the arm firmly comforting Richard, was trying to figure out how to fix that image in your mind and delete all others. Sonya Steven. Steven with Francesca Di Paoli, with Ana Dos Santos ... No, it was well ... No more torture would allow ...

As I used to every night, Richard was later to his room after dinner, bouncing smoothly to the girl who had helped her to undress. He always came to visit him and sometimes stayed with her until she fell asleep. I read or was told of his travels around the world and sometimes massaged her feet and wrists with aromatic oils that gave a sense of comfort in the skin.

That night he was restless and somewhat changed. He asked direct questions rather than suggestions that used to do before stammering, in the manner of a child who starts to take its first steps.

Richard Avery, how come I have not met before? What is the mystery? I mean on the boat, when I was with Andre and you watched me with binoculars ...

Instead of being angry and be rude to her, Richard chuckled.

- "So you noticed? I was able to watch you on other occasions.

Once in Nassau when you decided to sneak and take a bath in a beautiful fountain which had its own waterfall. Remember?

Ginny gasped.

"Yes, but ...

- Do not you want to know the second part of the question? I did not intend to become a mystery, but I tend to be shy in the midst of the crowds and questions ... They say I'm a loner and maybe it is.

The truth is that he was involved in an investigation and I had promised to send a letter to a colleague in Vienna. So do not want to be disturbed. But you seemed quite disturbing to me, sweetheart. Actually I found you irresistible. That's why I chased around like a lamb lover. Now I'm glad I did. Otherwise I had not found that day at the cathedral.

"I am glad. So I guess I forgive him for having spied on the moments when I thought I was in complete privacy. But tell me, why do you insist on saying that ... I am his wife?

"Maybe so much that I want what you really are.

His voice resembled that of a boy and felt Ginny bent over his bare hand touching her ring.

"Besides, I have to give some explanation. I mean all those right-thinking authorities that insist on passports and other formalities ... Tell them that we were married seemed the easiest way ... And to tell the truth, I feel it's true. Someday I'll explain, I promise. When you're able to hear it.

"I could see his face," she murmured. When I give these explanations, whatever, I'll be able to find out ...

- If lying or not? "I said gently and took her hand to her lips. Oh, dear! Listen to my voice. Touch my face so you can tell if my expression changed. In the past you have been hurt by the lies and deceptions but I swear I'm not going to hurt or disappoint knowingly. I love you, I love you now and I've loved from the moment you laid eyes on top ... And even before that. You and I have known and loved many times we have other lives and will do so again. You think I'm crazy?

"No," without much conviction even tried to hide his doubts, but I think much is going to have to explain.

He then began to speak softly, gently, caressing and firm, the voice she remembered from so many previous nights that reached even through the veil of unconsciousness. This was the man who had saved his life. The man who loved her unselfishly and that he was convinced that their meeting was marked by destiny.

That night he left her sleeping alone like I used to. After explained Richard Avery made love, first with words, then with hands, with those tender hands and wise ... lips and then finally when she was tense as a bow to explode, vibrant with desire, then endorsed lying beside her and holding her tenderly against him until both were sweetly asleep.

Chapter 23

In the turbulent life of Ginny, always in search of happiness, that night was a new departure. It seemed that he had crossed some invisible barrier, running madly for shelter, feeling at last that he had found behind a door that had closed saving after passing her,

leaving her safe. Yes, I thought, she finally felt safe and was Richard who had given him that assurance. I thought when he said that his blindness was only temporary. I trusted him and felt protected by their love and care. Did I need or I missed that swing of emotions that brought the paroxysm of happiness into the abyss of the greatest misfortune? Could the man wanted by who had to constantly fight tooth and nail, but is not sure he ever? Oh, yes, between Steven and she produced a kind of unstable chemical reaction, based on the intrigue and uncertainty! They had never trusted each other, that was the reason for their constant separations.

Those days it was easier not to think about Steven or the past. Richard listened to without being jealous or skeptical, and he explained everything, even his own actions. Like a perverse and defiant child had been hit after hit, hurting herself more than she ever would have hurt anyone. What a fool he had been! Now she, as stubborn and willful earlier, led by Richard left willingly. He was an exceptionally wise and tolerant man who showed patience and infinite love. He had been lucky in love!

Over time it seems that once painful and endless, no longer seemed important. Ginny let through the days and nights in a daze, watching a faded in others. He had lost the habit of asking what day or what time it was. Nothing mattered much, but it had the best reason in the world to make it happen: I was happy and was happy.

One day Helen went ... to see the mother, said with some hesitation. Poor Helen, Ginny thought. Not having a life, not having a man beside her. Helen tried to imagine as Richard was described: tall, thin, with ivory skin and prominent cheekbones. The dark brown hair ... Lord Tynedale had it blond, naturally ...

- When did he? Were happy your father and your mother?

For once Richard left to be done a little silence between them.

Ginny could imagine how shrugged.

- Can children really know? I always thought that his story was

really very romantic and, no doubt, my mother was a devoted wife to her husband. He was crippled after falling from a horse. The accident occurred a few years before I was born.

- How sad!

Ginny shuddered with grief and fear at a time. What if she is going blind forever?

"He died a few months ago," interrupted Richard, guessing on the fly, as usual, what she was thinking. You should not angst about it. He was sick for almost a year and knew he would die. I did my best to make her best until the last minute. It was a good man.

A Ginny seemed that his words were somewhat forced. As so often at the end of the day, Ginny would have liked to see at that time. Complete darkness was frightening and even more frightened of the idea of having to become dependent on others entirely, being a cripple.

- Did you love your father? "Trying to hide his feelings he missed the question without realizing that showed little tact. So he quickly added, "I guess ... I suppose I have been indiscreet but ... is ... I left with a broken heart of New Orleans, leaving my very sick father. I thought I loved him very much and yet not know him at all. I thought you wanted to use me ... And when I said it was not my real father ...

The story he was slowly sprouting lips. Richard remained silent until she had given vent. Do not know what to say until I heard him laugh.

- Oh, my love, which couples have run our lives! I am now more certain than ever that the threads of our past lives have always been intertwined. You see, the man whom I call 'father', nor was my real father. To me nobody told me and I had not known ever to have not fallen some papers in my hand, a kind of diary. When the man I always thought my father had the accident, she was told she could not have more children. That happened after birth Helena, my poor sister. She must have been a boy! Because you see, had a title, lands and rents which gave that title. Lord Tynedale was the

latest in the line of succession, and not have children, everything he owned in his life, according to a testamentary clause-would go to the crown. Do you understand why there needed to be an heir to ensure the welfare of my mother and my sister?

- Oh, Richard! You do not have ... I realize how painful it is you talk about that ...

Ginny felt the pressure of his fingers before he calmly said:

"No, no ... Why would it ache? It was obviously a blow, but I understood perfectly what had happened on his head. He loved his wife and she loved him for saving his life. Even ... I talked among ourselves for weeks became months and finally agreed. My father wrote to an old friend of his youth, a friend with whom I had lost touch for many years. That man was a widower and had a daughter who had to flee without their consent with a stranger in a foreign country. So ... Are you beginning to understand, my love? Do you understand what the plan and how I was conceived? My father "chose" to marry my mother ... my mother is still a beautiful woman, Ginny. At that time must have been splendid. He was only twelve years old when he rescued the English lord. It was still very young. She did her part. Fortunately the matter did not take long. The friend of my father was a strong and virile. I was born nine months after he left Cuba, the warm earth that Lord Tynedale had chosen to settle with his Persian wife.

- What then? Ginny asked, caught his imagination for the story he heard. Might they? ... The man who is your natural father, have you ever seen? And your mother, have you ...?

- Ah! Are you expecting the happy ending to this fairy tale? Well, I guess you can call it that. By being close to death, Lord Tynedale again wrote to his friend, of course, had not forgotten. But, was quite gentleman enough to stay away. He arrived in Cuba a few months after my father died. For me my father was Lord Tynedale and, shortly thereafter, I left Cuba. It was an immature reaction from me, which I would feel ashamed if I had not found you.

It seemed inconceivable, he thought Ginny upset. Richard was no accident blue eyes contrasting with his black hair. Not for nothing the timbre of his voice had always seemed familiar. And relatives fingers caressed her body, skillfully so excited ... An incredible series of coincidences, showed that Richard's father was ...

Francisco Alvarado, the grandfather of Steven! Ginny said, astonished that this was the reason why Richard was so sure that Don Francisco would not refuse to send to children.

But what think Steven? What would Steven when he knew the whole truth and realize that not only had lost his wife but also their children?

"He will not mind ... Anyway do not think he ever really believed that children were his. And there is no reason to continue thinking about it, "said Ginny is very hectic. No, listen to Richard who was not only medical bodies but of souls, and that with authority and firmness, had told him he had to think about the future and not discussed in the past. That was exactly what I had to do. Richard blindly trusted. It was unbelievable how he could calm in moments of decay and fear, armed only with the sweetness of his voice.

Richard did not hide anything, could count on his honesty. Until the end. Even after the latest revelation when he told Don Francisco was formally married to the mother of Richard and that was at their house in Mexico where Helena had traveled.

- And now, dear, I think you've had enough for one day! I see you frowning, and any excess tension can tell you the bad. Think only that you do not have to worry about anything. You are my beloved and only passion in my life will look after you have everything you want.

The cool fingers of Richard and grazed his forehead, as he was talking, Ginny fell into a sort of reverie. Shortly before he had begun a headache but felt no pain. I trusted him and somehow he thought he owed for saving his life. He left even to blame for everything that had happened and weaknesses.

"You're a woman who has survived overcoming all obstacles. Why

you are ashamed of that? No, dear, you need not blame you for anything less for being a woman could feel all the normal desires. You have a beautiful body that seems made just for making love, there's nothing wrong with that. I love you and yet I'm not jealous of your past or any of your lovers ... even of those whom thou hast thought she loved. You are so wonderful as a lover! How can I blame other people for having desired? Jealousy ... jealousy has nothing to do with love, are simply possessiveness. Stop brooding ... rest now and when you wake, you'll see everything clearly.

"Stay with me ... please.

Ginny heard his own voice almost inaudible.

"Always be with you as they wish.

His hands on her body, touching it with tenderness and understanding of their most secret folds. Not asking rudely but seeking to give her pleasure. And for the moment, making her forget everything.

Shortly thereafter, the precarious peace that Ginny was getting used to enjoy, was disrupted by the arrival of Don Francisco himself, his new wife and stepdaughter. While Ginny was glad of the return of Helena, feared that meet Don Francisco, of course, was about to occur. What would he think if I knew you were blind? Surely he could not entrust the care of two small children. It was an old man so stubborn and so strict! It was hard to imagine him married to a woman much younger than he, who had given him a son and that son was Richard!

"This business you have to face it. I know you enough courage. Smile! Come on, you will not live to eat ... I think you have booked a place in his heart, otherwise he would not have come. Richard's words were comforting but it was very difficult for Ginny sitting, waiting for the sound of the door opening, without getting caught by the memory of the scene that was recorded in the mind. The scene itself, a few years, compared to the same old

autocrat who told him that 'had' to marry her grandson. How old was it? The notion of time covered by a cloud appeared and the images overlap each other like the brushstrokes of an artist's palette. And at that moment, hearing the door open, the sound of a cane hitting the floor polished and the voice asking what was going on, Ginny thought the time had not passed at all. The difference is that this time she would not willingly give up! For Don Francisco, who looked at that beautiful young woman sitting against the open window where the sun was making the hair-waving was inconceivable that such biased green eyes not to see. By God, it looked the same ... They had to cut his hair and wore very attractively curled around the head, the style of French beauties of the First Empire. The defiant gesture of the chin like he was challenging before he had said a word, was the same as he remembered. And yet ...

He remembered what had been and still tired from the journey, but before they would kill him to admit, Don Francisco sighed as he steps across the room with something dull.

"Ginny, dear, forgive an old man sit before our talk start? There is much that we have to discuss. I appreciate a lot to let me know at the time you feel tired.

As she feared, could not restrain the tears that were struggling to escape the eyes, before ending the interview. It was rare that Don Francisco to be so understanding, much less be able to recognize with some hesitation, it was a mistake on their part to push for a marriage which obviously made her unhappy.

Ginny then tried to say:

"But I loved Steven. Please, you do not know me well enough to know that I never do what I really want to do, unless ... unless I impose it by force.

After softening the voice said:

"Steven really loved. I thought, my God, who had grown up in fairy tale where everyone ends up happy for all eternity. Not everything is your fault, you know! I was never the woman he

wanted. It must have been Anne who had always shown understanding and blameless when he ... when he disappeared for long periods. But I ... Sometimes I wonder if he ever forgave me for things that occurred to me ... or that I let happen to me. I think that once loved me ... or was persuaded that I wanted. But ... What none of that matters now? I do not know what to tell you ... You've been so good to me ... so understanding. I'm so tired ... and so lame! Steven could not bear to have a blind wife, however Richard ...

- Do you know everything, the full story?

Ginny could not see the face of Francisco but his voice sounded hoarse and shrill. Very different from the arrogant and confident voice she remembered him, even after receiving a stab.

"Richard has told me something ... Believe me I understand.

Without make concessions, Francisco told the rest of the story, even the later chapters and their encounter with Steven in Cuba. Ginny was not hard to imagine. I could see Steven's angry eyes, rage barely contained by the respect always, reluctantly, had felt for his grandfather.

"There was a long journey to find me. And he stayed in Cuba to allow me to leave me.

Saying Ginny thought he detected a chuckle in the voice of Don Francisco, as if it were a creature that is caught in the wrong. But it was not possible does it? ...

But the truth was that the late Lord Tynedale and his wife were supporters of the rebels and, when Don Francisco arrived at the farm, always accustomed to obey without asking questions, quickly became disillusioned with acting as the Spanish. He had made friends with some rebels and their supporters. We see how the Spanish outraged appropriated whatever they liked to feed-cattle, goats or sheep-without paying anything. Here again Steven seemed to have put the other side. I wanted to see her grandfather out of Cuba and had been very surprised by the hasty (he at least seemed hasty) marriage of Don Francisco.

"No, we agreed," explained the old man recovering his arrogance.

"But ...

"It did not matter was not the first time it happened! As Steven had many friends among the supporters of the government, only had to express what my wishes that eventually came true. The last thing I know about him is that he was traveling back to Havana even though I reminded him that they expected obligations here.

Naturally, at that moment I knew ...

It was a conversation in broken sentences, full of significant sighs and silences. The ending was very different from the first time they had spoken to each other. Ginny had the impression that Don Francisco had relented. Or that he felt guilty for not being able to protect that time when the French Colonel Deveraux arrested her for crimes they had committed Steven, and dragged her on that trip that changed both their lives forever.

Now it seemed that Don Francisco condoned truly your life change if they did not approve, and was willing to help for me to get a divorce. It was then that Ginny felt tears betrayed her. He felt ...

Oh, God, did not know how I felt! It seemed that he had spent his life hating or loving Steven Morgan ... his name always stuck in the soul ... Now, suddenly, all that life left behind and had to start again from scratch. Back to love, begin to trust again ... But has she ever had relied entirely on Steven or the feelings that inspired him? At least I was sure I could trust that had saved Richard's life and had never sought to exploit. Yes, Richard was sure that he truly loved her, simply. Even Don Francisco felt the same.

Otherwise I would have brought his grandchildren with him on a grueling journey.

"Do not know why I'm crying," he complained to herself as Ginny could feel her warm tears rolled down her face. After all I now had what was possible want is not it? ...

It was Richard who got dry her tears. Richard who was holding both hands in his as he kissed her wet cheeks and lips quivering, whispering in his ear:

"All punishment is not going to have to mourn again, dear. I promise to make you happy. Let's start a new life away from here. Our children, you and me.

As always his voice soothed her, making her feel safe. Ginny was sobbing and retching until he was freed of all: hate, love, frustration, fulfillment and disillusionment. After she fell asleep in the arms of Richard and his dream was returned to France at the time he was a girl of sixteen, leaning on tiptoe on the threshold of life, with arms outstretched to take advantage of all the experiences that were waiting. He felt able to begin again ...

Chapter 24

Prayers End. The sign hanging in the decrepit rusty rail whereabouts, grated windswept beginning to rise. It seemed appropriate starting point, given his state of mind "Prayers End, what garbage!" I had enough time had been traveling in that damn train car, with no company but his thoughts and miles still remaining to be done through Indian territory would serve him to think about other things. Survive. Use even the sparks of curiosity that caused him to wonder why Sam Murdock had called him urgently. Nothing except that useless meaningless parade of images that haunted him since that day of burning sun absurd in Cuba, when Maria Felipa Gonzalez Zulueta and put a hand on his arm and with his voice flat and affected, had told him that his wife had died.

Even now, the mind of Steven Morgan is automatically away from that image, going back to the unpleasant interview he had with his grandfather shortly before receiving the news.

"I presume to be a free man had said Don Francisco challenging it-but, are you sure that you follow your true inclinations? Or simply obey orders? I find it hard to believe you're in Cuba only on a pleasure trip with your last lover or you were so anxious to find me. Ha!

The snarl which he emphasized his words.

"You seem to forget too often and too easily, you're a married man with a family that should be your main concern. Because let me remind you that I can still handle my own affairs. I suppose your friend, the ubiquitous Mr. Bishop, is behind this.

Remembering the encounter with his grandfather was still pursing his brow gloomily. He must have remembered that Don Francisco did not like to mind their own business and had a tongue as sharp as a whip wielding so easily. Still Steven was a surprise to learn that the old man had taken a second wife to the eighty year-old widow of an old friend that had proved a mainstay of the rebels. It was not surprising that Julian Zulueta had been so complacent and so interested in helping in a veiled way to persuade Steven to his grandfather that he should leave Cuba as soon as possible to Mexico.

He could do it thanks to the kind escort of Spanish soldiers who had insisted on accompanying Steven until the late Lord Tynedale ranch. The same guard who had been more than willing to accompany the Tynedale old lady, her new husband and his small retinue of servants and luggage to the port of Nuevitas.

Ironically by that time Steven was almost decided to leave Cuba also, after having sent a telegram and a full report to Bishop, Paco letting the rebels hiding somewhere, will submit your version of history. But the accursed pride had prevented him from communicating openly with their irascible grandfather unreasonable and parted on the quay stiffly, Steven bowing before the little hand authority of their new and still attractive grandmother, as she wished once again many felicidades a voice intentionally blank.

"I would have liked to come with us," she said in her sweet voice. She felt she would have said something more, but he smiled lazily, and reluctantly announced that he had business to attend in Havana which admitted no waiting.

- Business call them? Francisco exploded. You have two children who will grow up wondering if they father. These disappearances

yours for months, without giving any explanation to those who may care about you ... Well, I've said all I had to say and I will not repeat myself. You've become a stranger to us all.

Was it perhaps abruptly repudiated his grandfather? Steven did not have time to find out for before he could say anything he heard a cough at his side. A Spanish corporal, with a stony face, informing him that he had a message for him in the barracks ... "Madame has traveled many miles" ...

"Go and mind your own business," said Don Esteban Francisco in dry, cold tone. I'll attend to mine.

The lady who had done all the way to Nuevitas to give herself the news, it was Mary herself Felipa.

Details. The rest were details. Delery Andre ... Ginny. "Irony and pure fate? He should have remembered his fierce challenge should have been warned by the serene words he spoke that day at Sonya's room when he turned to find keys in the door with a gesture of understanding in their eyes. It was then lost it, of course. Damn his arrogance. He was sure she would return to him. As a rough and uncouth husband had yelled at him and had threatened her, ordering her to return home when they should have known ... But what the hell was used to follow again and again turning to the issue? He and he alone was the murderer. Both as if he had deliberately thrown under the wheels of that carriage.

"Sorry to have been me who told him, but Dad thought it best to be found out by a woman. If there is anything we could do ... He had once wanted to kill himself. Almost he had succeeded, would almost strangled, if at that time she had not rushed and would have crushed her lips against his. It was then ... when they were still able to find each other.

The sound of wind blowing through the side of the decrepit building that served as the whereabouts, Steven and shook him back to the present. Anyway, bloody memories. No sense always turning to something that was hopeless. Delery Andre kill in a highly publicized match that was witnessed by half Havana, had

not served to ease his grief ... The sudden and surprising offer that will make your body Maria Felipa, handing his hitherto well-guarded virginity (it was the price of his freedom when he was about to be arrested and summarily executed) could not calm the desperate and violent desire he felt by the only woman who could not have and would never ever have. His witch hair and stormy green eyes blazing. Prayers End ... the name fit exactly to your mood.

Not many foreigners who fell in the left corner by the hand of God. An older man approached timidly tall man, at the time, threw his legs out of the car, to stretch the rickety platform, not bothering to hide his curiosity.

- Are you here to see Jack Prendergast, sir?

The response was a frown and a shrug, before saying:

"Well, I guess ... It is the people whom I thought I estimate when I walked around here ...

Burdened by the weight of the panniers went to one of the luggage vans, followed by the talkative old to be stepped up beside him.

-Plan to stay a while here ... Right?

The stranger rushed to convince his spirited horse, which snorted excited to abandon the relative safety of the van, and said nothing.

-Denver House is the name of the best hotel in town, "said old solicitous. That's where all the friends of Mr. Prendergast when crossing in the village.

"I never said it was his friend," the man in deceptively mild tone. But their deep dark blue eyes fixed on the old, they were hard and sharp.

He jumped on the back of his steed, heading for the handful of houses some distance away, were visible in the west, wondering why they had chosen this remote location to make the stop rail.

Behind him he heard the voice of old:

"If you look for a cheap place to eat well, go to Casa Lorna.

Without turning his head, the young man shouted "thank you" and spurred his horse to reach the people as soon as possible.

The old man, scratching his head, stared at him. "Why not drop in El Paso and take care ... It is the surest way to reach Prendergast ..."

Two men who had been hanging around and talking with the station chief, left the platform and stared at the horse and rider.

"Another of the hired guns of Prendergast. What I say ... We must stop this or we sweep.

"Yes, we are always saying that, but nobody does anything.

Anyway how do you know that is one of the Prendergast? If it were, had not been down here.

"Unless you come to spy. You may want to find out how we are well organized ... It is possible ... Did you see the amount of iron that he brought? Two pistols and a rifle, very new indeed. I tell you

...

- Can you think that is a great shooter who boasted that Prendergast was hiring? "The same people who cleared the land occupied by the old Brady near Red Mountain?

- Who the hell else? I'll say again, if we do nothing ...

He who thus spoke, a man in his twenties, with a shaggy blond beard seemed mad and indignant. His face red and twisted his mustache.

His friend measured the platform, shaking with each stride.

Matar. Once and for all I'll do something for myself. Why not look at Milt Kehoe and the rest of the boys? The old Milt ... I bet that he comes up with something.

The toothy old who had remained close enough to hear the conversation, said pompously:

"I saw his eyes. I would have thought he was a Mexican if it were not for those eyes. It was really very dark eyes, blue and very hard. Eyes murderers.

When she had succeeded in winning their attention, lowered his voice, noting that the employee was watching from behind the barred window.

"And what is more, said he intended to see Prendergast. He said he

knew. Yes, sure you knew!

The howling wind was reminiscent of the weeping of the women who cry for lost love, who will not return distant past and future that never came. The wind blew down the street chips and powder with pungent smell it ran down into the nostrils. The earth was red and the sky was red, a feast of crimson flames, issuing from the clouds curled as if they were tall chimneys like towers, foreshadowing the storm in the mountains.

With gesture in a bad mood, Steven pulled his hat forward. God, began to feel immersed in unreality! Was it the odd name that these people had chosen to put the people or would your mood? "Where was everybody?

Steven, riding his black horse nervous raised high, was the only human being was in sight but other horses tied to hitching appeared along the street. The village consisted of a small group of ugly wooden houses, huddled in the midst of abject desolation. The pale orange of the windows, like eyes reflecting the afternoon sun coyote. He had been told here there was a larger town before the war. The armies of North and South, coming and going across the deserts of New Mexico territory playing at war, had become dilapidated. Some stubborn rebuild had insisted on the grounds that the man who now read the blurry sign that said he could not understand Livery Stable.

"Well," thought Steve, why not? "One more place to spend another night before moving on. As the sun set behind the mountains as a rock of fire, light a lamp appeared almost as if he did welcome signs. It was the first time he wondered bitterly why he had chosen that moment Sam Murdock among all to take a long vacation and, why he had decided to take the vacation at the ranch of Prendergast lost in the middle of nowhere. Especially because his partner did not believe in the holiday as he had repeated so many times.

"Dammit, I will not waste time brooding," he said somberly Steven, I will make this clear when I meet Sam the bastard. "

The truth is that lately pondered too. Lost time, too long ... swore to himself. "Why not?", Again thought to himself, coughing to expel the dust that had stuck in his throat. At the same time agile steed dismounting. In a flash, her long legs clad in blue were planted beside the sorrel restless while, caressing him, whispering in his ear.

The owner of the barn, a fat man with red hair, grumbled: "Cursed cholo unwise," he thought. The horse was unshod, and what he, if Barker had learned, the rider had dismounted badly. But now realized that the newcomer was a good pistol in his belt and decided (what heck!), That money was money and whether the newcomer could afford the horse's attention, but come out .. . Anyway abroad seemed to be one of those travelers who spend long after settling his affairs. And, whatever those issues, he, if Barker had no interest in knowing ... Although he had already decided that the man was probably one of the gunmen Prendergast, sent to explore the surroundings.

"For Milt and the other guys not going to like him hanging around here, he thought his lips stretching into a grin that, in teaching the snuff-stained teeth, seemed to be a smile, while abroad he was going to drag the horse covered with dust.

Once the animal was delivered to the care of the innkeeper, Steven went to the saloon. He needed a drink to cleanse the throat of the dust. Despite how small it was the town had several to choose from. Random opted for the "Red Sky". It was he who was closer to the barn.

Chapter 25

The saloon was not too crowded. Outside the tavern that served at the bar, there were only two men engaged in a chess game and an old black man who pounded the piano keys as old as he. It turned to open and close the door letting in dust and a puff of hot air, but Steven could see the whites of his eyes before he looked away from the whole.

Chess players looked up the board but engage in it again, although not as concentrated as before. The landlord began to rub energetically rough wooden counter, rattling glasses and three Mexicans who were standing in the back of the room talking to them, they ran even deeper. Her dark eyes suddenly turned cautious.

It is possible that they were not used to seeing foreigners pass through. The town's name was probably something to do with it. Besides, who would stop at such a place? The roads did not reach much further and the stop closest was many miles away.

"Whiskey," said Steven briefly and have decided to get out there criticized just because the name of the halt had fired the imagination, feeling the burning liquid slid down to her stomach. It was the lure of liquor carefully fermented, aged and soft, which was used to make recently and badly needed at that time. The force of habit made him look around and look at the exits and windows. The sly and oblique glances threw it aroused his curiosity. They were normal in every village near the border in the Indian territory that seemed meant to be loot from anyone. And the old railway station had asked him if he was a friend of Prendergast. She wondered if that would mean that Prendergast was herding cattle as far south. No it did before ... Heck, not so long ago that! But he had been in many bars and traveled to many countries, since she had seen last Prendergast. And since then many things could have changed for Prendergast as he had changed.

He pushed the glass on the counter to fill it again, wondering if it would be inappropriate to follow the advice of the old station and go to "House Lorna" to get a good bed and a cheap meal. Bed early and leave early or even earlier. He knew this part of the country. It was strange to think how many times had long passed by that town without ever having felt curious to enter.

The door creaked back and forth to make way for a group of men who came huddling and talking loudly. As if moved by a spring, the old pianist straightened in his chair and began to play the keys

with more force than he had been showing so far. And a woman of indeterminate age looking bored and came out of a back room with a blank smile showing his gold teeth.

- Hello, Lottie!

One man walked around her waist giving her a resounding kiss. She lifted her head of curly hair stretched tight.

Jared Cady, what would you think your wife? I declare that I find it difficult sometimes to remind you that you are a married man.

"No married men, Lottie ... Only married women.

Another of the men hit his knee while the others laughed occurrence.

Judging by the clothes, all seemed puesteros or small ranchers who had decided to spend the night in town. However, the instinct of danger so long slept, made Steven feel uncomfortable. She noticed how he looked, then his eyes away, pretending to deliberately ignore his presence. Common sense told him there were many foreigners passing through this town. Had been normal a hint of curiosity, but the men, talking loudly and joked, seemed to ignore her loneliness and neglect appearance, standing at one end of the bar while they were piled on the counter to keep out of it.

"Sing us a song, Lottie. Singing "Dixie" ...

"Naturally, what you say, Milt. But I have to wet her lips first ... It was a very hot day.

Lottie-Serve, Bert. And the rest of my friends. The man needs to have friends around here, eh, boys? There are too adventurous and too many horse thieves pretending to steal what is ours legally, saying they have no rights over our own land, only because we, boys, fought in the war and they did not. I call them cowards and thieves.

- Did you mean Prendergast?

One man put his elbows on the counter battens, tilting the shoulders.

- Shit, Milt! You know that Prendergast is a thief, a man who began stealing cattle from guys who had gone to fight in a war of

men. You know what I and the rest of those here.

The man named Milt raised his glass and gulped down the contents, immediately pushing it on the counter and have it refilled. Then he said loudly:

Mr. Prendergast in addition to being a coward and a thief hired gunmen from outside to do her dirty work here.

Suddenly his eyes fell on the tall man with blue eyes, standing at the other end of the bar, stroking his glass.

"Well, I had not realized that here was someone else, while we were talking so freely. Not many foreigners here, the land of adventurers and renegades as they call this part of the country. And that's not to mention the rats and scorpions! You is not theirs, eh, sir?

The blue eyes looked belligerent faced by Milt Kehoe, calmly but being cold and cautious because Steven had attracted the hostility that floated into the room and was acting prudently.

"I'm just passing through ... sir.

He had deliberately paused before saying "sir" so that the word seems insulting. Kehoe's long face flushed.

"Not many guys go through this town. Not much to see in this part of the country, as there are cows, dust and dirt ... Much land. Most of it away by hired gunmen. He paused and added suggestively,

"But you will not be part of those adventurers cheats right? Bet you was a rebel like us, is not it?

"I did not take part in the war abroad," said a quiet voice, soft, uninflected and added: "Much time has passed since then, is not it? And now, I am unwilling to claim any right of war.

He finished pulling leisurely drink some coins on the bar and past the confused Milt Kehoe. He noted with humor that except the pianist, all had remained glued to their places, interrupting what they were doing to watch the scene. Lottie, the frightened girl who was serving the customers of the ballroom, her eyes wide open. Steven touched the brim of his hat greeting as he walked toward the door jamb, measuring each of its steps. For some reason, a

group of alarmed and angry men had gathered and he had the feeling that they were studying ...

I do not know what you think, Milt, but I can smell a mile away, an adventurer or a hired gunman.

The voice, tense and excited, belonged to the blond-bearded young man who had called Jared Cady Lottie.

Recognizing the nervous and harsh tone of voice of the boy, Steven paused a moment while the man continued insulting:

- What would I do without their guns? Do guys have noticed? Is not man enough to turn around and face?

A bottle thrown with professional precision crossed my mind of Steven and crashed at his feet making him hesitate. Then he heard the raucous laughter of Cady.

"Oh look, Milt, is running, what I said? Not even going to pay the whiskey bottle that has made me break.

"Shit," thought Steven, turning slowly to observe of the blond braggart who had already taken his revolver.

-Prepared to collect, sir ... A Bert likes to keep the place clean.

Steven's eyes gaze remained high and serene even in view of the revolver with an air of sarcasm, the other grasped. Jared Cady noticed and Steven's attitude should have warned him. But it was known and supported by his friends to confront a hit man made him feel emboldened. Aloud he said:

- Come on! I said the pick! ... Until the last piece! What you're waiting?

At the feet of Steven bounced a shot. She gasped but Steven was not fazed.

"When you have collected, I'll drop the guns do shake the shit before ...

Cady laughed and launched provocative glances at his audience while demanding approval growled:

"If you do not hurry I'll make a hole. Dale! Just a few days ago, Bert is saying you need a new sweeper here ...

He moved the gun menacingly, excited by the pleasure of

shooting, while abroad, shrugging his shoulders, seemed truly meek and resigned. But with the speed of lightning flew at him exasperated rage, hitting her hand.

Cady roared, holding his wrist with the other hand, as he dropped the gun.

- Son of a bitch! I've broken wrist!

Almost screaming in pain, lifted his other arm but the stranger was faster, cooler and more efficient. She put an arm on the neck and the other punched him in the stomach. Jared Cady fell back against the bar moaning and retching and, amid the general silence, the blue-eyed stranger stood up and looked around him without expression.

"The truth is that you have a very welcoming place," said the astonished barman pretending while lighting a cigarette.

The coin on the counter threw bounced off the belly fat by the owner rolled under his feet.

In two strides went outside. The sun had set, was very dark and the weather had turned very cold. Steven finished his cigarette he was terrible. He dropped it with the feeling that something was wrong. Instinct, perhaps ... A warning from their nerve endings. Perhaps the impression that something was moving in the shadows.

From a window across the street, a flashlight illuminated the face while the lattice opened wide. He stepped aside cursing to himself, firing his pistol drawn and at the same time. But at that moment it seemed as if thrown at him from different directions at once. He felt his leg twice, but he said coolly to the torch and hit the target. No time to reload the weapon, not even to think ... For pure reflection Steven pointed to the places they departed the flashes. I could feel the bullets grazed his body forcing him to retreat, despite trying to remain upright against the wall. A shot fired from behind the water pipe, threw him against the wall again, when he fell and swore loudly. He tried to turn around and keep shooting, turned and went back to pull desperately using its last defenses because the left arm was paralyzed and disabled. I only had a gun,

how many bullets? ...

The tavern door opened and Jared Cady, still reeling, he pointed the gun.

- Son of a bitch and see if you get a good time!

Steven raised his gun, noting that he fell again and could not get up. It seemed that fired the gun but could not, secure it. Suddenly everything started to fade and her body failed to obey the orders given him by his desperate brain. He heard a deafening roar that seemed to explode in the skull, knocking him into space and making it very slowly round and round, floating, y. .. A final idea crossed his mind before it all disappeared: "Gosh, I'm dying." After ... nothing.

The calm that followed the roar of the heavy gunfire, is almost painful to the ears where the shooting still echoed. Then suddenly we heard the clatter of the wheels of a cart coming down the street and the roar of all the tension released. We heard screams, explanations, commands.

- Stop shooting, stupid! Out of here! We got him!

- Hey! He gave Murphy and Jared! ...

As timid limelight, the quarter moon, wrapped in a shawl of clouds, lit the jagged peaks of the mountains and it was possible to observe that she was pale and distraught, who drove the cart. Her dark hair hung loose to the wind beneath the white handkerchief she had worn to protect him.

- What happened? By God, someone tell me what happened!

Jared! ...

Jared could do nothing, Lizzie. Sorry. He was a foreigner, one of the hired guns of Prendergast. He began to discuss and to pull together. Sorry ...

- Hey! We will remove these bodies in the street before he wakes up the sheriff. Sorry, but we'll have to use your cart, Lizzie. Bert ...

"Sure, Milt. I'll take care of everything and send to Dr. Cady's

house immediately. The sheriff does not have to learn anything, hell.

"I should not have come, Lizzie. I'm really sorry. Dame, I'll take the reins.

An old man climbed robust body next to the desperate young, with a firm hand, controlled the nervous horses neighing and pranced to the smell of fresh blood.

- Jared? -. He repeated the girl as a whimper and, sobbing, turned his head to rest it on the shoulder of the elderly. The old car springs creaked and groaned under the weight of bodies diligent hands suddenly dropped it.

- What we do with it? I would leave it to the gallinaceous. He managed to Jared, Tom and Blackie ...

"We took it too. It's not that I find him still Prendergast. Let it wait and speculate. Raise your body up here, Peter. We can throw it to the chicken-morning.

The trip to Cady's house lasted over an hour and by then, the woman, Elizabeth Cady, his eyes dry and his face distorted.

"I knew something was going wrong. Jared begged not to go to town and when he finally left, I kept having a bad feeling ... He should not have taken Fidelito with him ... They were not things that a child could see ... Oh, God ...

"Shut up, Lizzie, hush ... You'll see how the neighbors come to accompany you tonight. I know it's very hard ...

Jared did not have the slightest chance of defending themselves. None of those who were hit had it ... He was fast ... Let us face it. Who knows how he would pay Prendergast.

There was further concern when he finally arrived at the house. When the men were unloading the cargo funeral, found that at least one of the fallen, the outsider hired by Prendergast, was still alive.

"The bastard is still breathing ... I can not explain how!

-Milt Kehoe was confused. I will end with him once ... So ...

- No!

She turned astonished to recognize the voice of Elizabeth Cady stopped him when he had prepared the weapon and take aim.

- Come on, Lizzie! ...

"No," she said again, half dead, his voice became stronger as she realized that everyone was watching, some with pity, others with curiosity. If you are still alive and the doctor can save it, will be hanged ... A murderer!

Chapter 26

When he regained consciousness, he seemed to be watching the ocean surface from several feet deep ... Only light areas and dark shadows of images passing before his eyes and disappeared without him was able to fix on any. He was awake, or at least alive, but where? How? He closed his eyes and, when reopened, was found in a small room full of sunshine. His whole body was bandaged, including the head that hurt him greatly, much as the rest of the body. There was a woman in the room, quite nice indeed, with dark brown hair and hazel eyes. She watched cold and stern, and when their eyes met, eyes squinted hard look. I could not understand their attitude. Why hate him? I had not seen before.

Steven wanted to talk, but before even trying, he realized that he was too weak and tired to make that effort. However, due to leak any sound because she leaned over and gave him to drink water that almost caused her to choke. With a dry voice that seemed to come from afar, she asked if he was able to speak but much to his regret, he felt terribly eyelids felt heavy and he fell asleep again. She lapsed into a kind of reverie. At some point realized that the gesture stern woman leaned over him again, forcing him to take a kind of watery soup. On another occasion a man of curly silver beard making him the bandages removed so much damage that he could not help moan. The woman was also in the back of the

room, his face expressionless and angry.

- Are you going to live, doctor?

"I can not understand how he is still alive with all the lead they stuck. Constitution is very strong and you are an exceptional nurse, Lizzie. And somehow, not that I regret not having armed again ...

The conversation intrigued the man lying in bed and wanted to ask ... But the ideas he escaped before he could shape them, and after leaving the doctor, the pain became even more intolerable.

Although he tried to stay awake until poderle ask the woman ... poderle to ask why ... He slept again.

The next time was evening. I had no way of knowing what day it was but the light from outside was red and realized that someone had lit a lamp in the room. The woman brought him a soup in a clay bowl and set about feeding to their greatest humiliation. That time, making an enormous effort, he could mutter "thank you" ... when she had finished.

It was rising from his chair but stopped and asked with distaste:

- Do you feel better?

Steven shook his head, closing his eyes for the pain the movement caused him and without saying another word, she left the room. He returned almost immediately with a pair of handcuffs and, before he could stop, he assured his right hand to the bars of the bed.

He frowned at her in amazement.

- Why do that? I understood that the doctor had said something to her care because I saved your life, is not it? Why, then ...?

"Just so they can hang him," she replied coldly, turning away.

He stared at the door by which she had just disappeared and tried to think, to remember ... He could not. The smallest effort exhausted him and noticed he was going away from reality to fall back into a deep sleep.

The next day he took care of women and with the same efficiency and coldness that would deal with a sick animal that was destined for slaughter. That would be in the morning because he had

brought a foul brew for breakfast, refusing at first to talk to him.
- Why? "He felt strong enough to insist. I wonder why I'm going to hang and why we want you both ...

Finally, almost on the verge of anger, she turned to him and said sharply:

"One of the men whom you killed last week was my husband .Su voice became even more bitter. You came here, come from who knows where as a wolf prey, like a hired gun. I heard that you were very fast and not given a chance to defend himself, does not it? So now you know why you are going to hang up and why I'll be there to witness it.

"But I ...

He was still frowning, trying to remember when she turned and left the room, slamming the door that made him see stars. He closed his eyes and lay there feeling the pain would take hold of his body. The pain reminded him ... yes, there had been a shooting. The sound of guns spitting fire at him ... The terrible shock of the bullets which split the meat. He had no right to be alive, he remembered that he was dying!

The shutters of the room were drawn, but were old and broken, so let sunlight filter and the noise outside: voices, kicking horses, cows mooing.

The woman ... Who was he? Was she present when the shooting? Why was not he dead? Every time I tried to think back a headache, every time I tried to move, the pain was so strong that he feared losing the sense it was easier to fall asleep ... die again ...

In that sort of half dream, half a coma, he moved and rolled about without knowing that they were reopening the wounds. The heat from the blood sticky and cold he felt inside, made him shiver ...

Vaguely he realized everything and he thought he was awake because she thought she heard the sound of his own voice. What had been saying? Skin was burning hot and had thrown the sheets of the bed and floor. When she gently touched his forehead, his hand felt cold as ice.

"I think it has had no fever. Drink this.

He was getting tired of her little game. Why not let him die at once? But the woman pressed her lips against the cup firmly and forced him to swallow. The rage of being useless was unbearable. When she finally say something, her voice choked and unknown.

"Listen, lady ... Mrs. ...

Hell, it seemed too young to have been married.

"You should try to speak.

He left, as vigorous as ever, leaving you more frustrated than ever. He had begun to doubt whether he actually existed or was a figment of his imagination. Did it were dreams or hallucinations? You may be dead and that this room was white and impersonal hell.

He began studying the site, noting that the rays of sunlight that came through the slats of the blinds were broken shadow on the floor and walls. On the wall opposite him was a tapestry of lace and in the corner, a wooden crucifix. Was she a Catholic? In front of the iron bed was an old toilet with a crocheted cloth top. Below the window, a toilet table with a jug without a handle, burnished copper and chipped porcelain basin.

There was a prison since there were no bars. And yet he was in prison. The creak of the wife subject to the bars of the bed was not remember. And he was told he would be hanged. Why, for heaven's sake? Had he been tried while he was unconscious or it would be really a lynching? Why had not seen anyone but her? Had he really been a doctor to change the bandage a few days or so had also been a dream?

He fell into a torturous nightmare. Nightmares succeeded each other. He saw himself killing, running, chasing someone, through deserts and mountains, pursued in turn by someone he could not see ... The body of a young woman gently pressed against hers and a shock of red hair covering her face loose without letting him see. He tried to squeeze it but the shots continued and made him fall. Shots that sounded like whipping, piercing the meat, extending a

painful agony until she died again ... He knew he was dead because he was underground, trapped, trying to free themselves never to die suffocated.

Tried to get up but the handcuffs clanked against the bed and he fell back helpless, panting and her body covered with sweat. With bitter frustration felt the pain and helplessness in the body and soul.

Unexpectedly, the woman appeared again, and touched his forehead for the first time, his voice betrayed some feeling.

- What the hell has been up to? Is it stupid enough to believe it could be released?

He was tempted to beg but struggled to remain silent. She put the lamp he had brought and, half distracted, he noted that his hair pulled back in a thick braid that hung over one shoulder. He wore a light coat collection with a belt and when she leaned over him, he noticed the smell of fresh soap woman bathed recently. He put his hand on the forehead and onto his chest was impassive, concerned said:

- Is drenched in sweat! Has had no fever ...

Suddenly their eyes met. His, desperate for an answer. The darker it little by little until finally separate them as if they could continue holding his gaze any longer.

"He must be thirsty," he said stiffly, and brought him water.

Whenever he was forced to swallow something, but this time he was grateful.

"Thank you ...

She was acting as if startled. He came to fix the pillow and stretching the sheets, covering the half-naked body. He was beginning to look like a female. The gown he wore had no way but to the light of the lamp, he could see the body lines. Was about to leave, perhaps too hastily putting his hand to take the lamp, when he said:

"No, do not go, please.

She stopped her back.

"Now I will feel better. Febrile crisis has passed.

"I must speak with you," he said impatiently. You have to understand.

- Got it?

He turned and left the lamp shades to see the hard and unforgiving mind feigned expression of his face. The voice was almost shrill:

"Sir, I know too well the kind of men like you. Evil men who, like mad dogs, looking for victims to pounce on them. Above carrying guns give them license to kill anyone who gets in their way, as my husband. You and your class-spoke full of venom would be in jail, not around the loose ... Or are you a fugitive escaped on their own?

- What prison? What do you mean?

Had pulled his black eyebrows and his voice sounded as tough as hers.

The woman laughed bitterly.

- Oh, not many secrets that can hide! Do you think anyone will notice all those scars? You have been shackled and had been whipped. Ojala had finished with you then! Whatever what you did to bring these ends, security was not good. You are evil personified ... that's what it is ...

Steven was listening to somber, hoping that would reach the final, then said softly, and choked with anguish:

- My God, you have imagined more about me than I myself know! So I am a criminal fugitive, and also kills a rabid dog for killing ...

- That's right! And do not confuse me because it has served to bring him back to life when, on good law, would be dead. I've done the same for any sick animal ... even a coyote ... At least this time, will not be saved from being hanged!

He looked astonished at his vehemence.

- Have I been tried already? So tell me why anyone ever going to hang me?

Her face turned white with rage.

- Piece of hypocrisy! Do not you dare think I'm going to make fun of pretending to not remember what he did ... Or is that murder is

so little to you that has lost count of the dead that takes over?
He raised the lamp and went to the door, the back straight with anger. He stared in silence, blind impotence. Damn woman!

When he reappeared, his face showed no expression. I never even watched as the priest proceeded to change the bandages and very efficiently. He watched in silence but also realized that she noticed that her eyes were fixed on her, because she dyed her cheeks flush. It was really nice but had a slim and graceful and arrogant stance. High cheekbones, a generous mouth when not pressed in disapproval, a well-defined chin. Best of the features were the eyes. Golden green eyes, particularly transparent, large and separate, shaded by long black lashes. He had a thick mop of hair that escaped him in his temples brush curly locks that could not master.

Suddenly, impulsively, he broke the ominous silence efforts to not blinking, as he adjusted the bandages.

- Will he come back to visit the doctor?

She looked at him calmly.

"It is not necessary. You are being restored quickly, and I rough enough to make me cures and change dressings.

He could not help but note with a sneer:

I do not understand why it takes so much work. Feeling what you feel, do not understand why not let me die. The same could have enjoyed seeing me bleed to death, that seeing me hanged.

"I've expressed my feelings, sir. And then you hang it, it will be a warning to others of their ilk.

- Do you usually hang you without giving people the opportunity to be judged as it should?

- Why was going to need a trial? He killed three men in cold blood, including my husband, and wounded another who may not survive. There were enough witnesses. So do not bother to be here inventing lies in the hope of saving their skins-.Tenía face red with

anger. No, sir. You came here to kill in order to collect the money that the bloodthirsty Prendergast offers ...

"Who wants to be the ones I killed in cold blood, it seems that also had a good shot ...

He said he thought wryly and say something else. But she again ignored and left the room slamming the door. He looked again at the ceiling and walls, wondering what would the other side of the window. It was hot. One could almost say that smelled the dust of the street. How long would there? When she decided the time of his death?

When he returned to bring lunch, took a different tack.

"It would be easier if I let out a little so I could feed myself on my own.

"I do not trust you," she coldly .Contestó.

He continued feeding her, sitting on the edge of the bed, as if feeding a recalcitrant child.

- Can I smoke? He asked.

The woman frowned.

"I do not snuff at home. And also one of the bullets hit a lung and smoking would not help him recover.

Steven broke into a laugh that made her chest hurt. Grace was not without much concern for his health, one who harbored macabre purposes with respect to it. She turned red with anger.

- You're impossible!

"And you must admit there are a lot of black humor in this situation. You have given me back to life when he was, apparently, at the gates of death. And now he's sitting on the edge of my bed, feeding like a baby and refusing a cigarette ...

She was furious and his face was pale blush tinted, making it appear more beautiful.

- How dare you speak so confidently? A man like you ... A beast! ...

- Is that why you have tied me like a tame wolf? Or are other reasons, Madam?

- Oh ...

He jabbed, panting with rage. His hands he had already noted before, were rough and calloused as if it were his life would have had to work hard. As he had been leaning on the strength of the blow made him lose his balance and fell over the wounded. With an almost reflex, he encircled her waist with his free arm. For the same reason he found himself kissing her, taking advantage of both sides had been close together. For a moment it seemed that she would reply, almost surrendering. But then, with an exclamation rude, turned from him, giving him a blow on the mouth in a display of dignity and turning on his heel to go away without a word.

Chapter 27

An old Mexican, chewing snuff and muttering, Steven brought the next meal.

"At this gringo pig, must leave it to die like wounded coyotes; to hang it seemed too good for him. The lady should not have been caring hands dirty like carrion ...

- Where is she? Doing the preparations for hang?

The old man glared at him, stretching out her lower lip as he slid up the bed.

- "So you speak Spanish? It has all the appearance of a villain, except for blue eyes. But ... "she added quickly regretted having spoken, are not mine. Eat and finish once. I have many things to do outside and do not care if I starve or not ...

Steven moody shrugged, wincing in pain followed.

"And I assure you, man, that to me I do not care ... All I want to know is why they are all so anxious to see me hanged. It is the first time I see a man acting in self defense when he is ambushed, deserves to be hanged. Or is that the laws are different in this part of the country?

He was still as weak as a newborn kitten and very sore. He immediately noticed by human eyes and the gesture, that it was useless to talk. It was obvious, and was beginning to remember,

who had been confused with someone else and so had decided to liquidate. Since they had not been successful on the first try, had fabricated a story that fits its plans.

The old, stubborn, refused to say anything more. When he left, Steven had to make an effort to remain calm and not throw out of bed, just to test the resistance of the wives. The problem was that he was not very strong. It was intolerable to be so weak and feel the pain overcame him when he tried to move. Damn! To think, it cost too much effort! He did beat the brain to slip into the darkness of sleep or unconsciousness to escape suffering. I had no way to measure time, could barely make out the difference between day and night. He had become a goddamn vegetable and almost thought it would welcome the sounds of the boots of the men who would come to fetch him to hang.

On two other occasions the old Mexican wine meet their needs, without saying a word unless it was for himself and his breath. Finally she reappeared and he had to admit that I had missed despite the tension between them.

He remained silent, stiff-sharp cheekbones and he looked not talk as always efficient, changed his cures and he adjusted the bandages. Impassive fucking bitch! What is the difference between her and the Mexican?

He fought the pain, feeling the sweat bathed his body fouls the cuts and wounds that seemed to cover it completely, and heard him say:

"Here," as he approached a cup to his mouth.

If your left arm had been bandaged his chest, he would have pushed the cup that would have seemed futile gesture, but as neither could do it, drank obediently at her with eyes as spiteful as hers.

He threw the tin container into the bowl with unnecessary violence and stood there, rigid, his back half turned. As per requirement said

- Do you feel any better?

- Do you mind, perhaps?

He turned in time to see her sarcastic look, accompanied by raised eyebrow, and blushed.

"I see you are well enough to be rude.

"Then I'm good enough to hang me is not it? What are you waiting for?

"If ever I met a man who deserves to be hung, that is you.

He gave vengeful, angry about the sneer with which he nodded.

- Do they not aware? Do not feel any remorse for having killed so many men in cold blood?

"It's hard to have remorse for trying to defend a handful of thugs," she reproached him angrily but may end up sorry I have not finished the work or is there still time?

There was some threat in the tone in which he said the last words that angered even more.

"Do not wait save his skin by inventing a lie so blatant. Sunday I said that he had told the same thing and let me tell you not going to save the head with ...

"Ma'am, I know you've made the thought of being hanged and nothing will change, why then the preaching and the delay? Or does it smacking imagining the scene? You may have to be that people who enjoy a performance both as a party.

- You! ... Only a depraved mind like yours could imagine such a thing ...

He grunted as he felt the hatred and venom in his voice.

- Why do you take it, ma'am? ... By the way is pleased to talk about it, there seems to dislike the little party witness in which, for revenge, you adjust the tie to a man ...

Without saying a word, she looked deep hatred and gave him back out of the room giving a big bang, followed by derisive laughter from him.

Frowning, Steven stared at the camera. Another skirmish win and probably she would never appear to come and look. He wanted not remember how it feels to be hanging, drowning slowly ... But

memories came back to him with excessive precision. A cell in Dallas and the rope hanging from a nail in the wall ...

"Son of a bitch, you going to hang" ... The raucous laughter, hysterical, the blond woman named Toni Lassiter before he stopped hearing it, turned off by the beating of his own blood to be raised slowly, slowly ... Marry, was being morbid and that was no help at all! It was better to hope that this time would use a horse or gallows.

He appreciated the unexpected distraction that tore from his memories.

- Lord! OHS, sir!

Beneath a mop of badly cut black hair, eyes like coal, watching him intently. A boy had broken one of the slats of the blinds and looked at him curiously.

Steven stared back at the boy, whose round face clearly showed a mixture of fear and desire to snoop.

- Hi, kid! Steven said finally.

The boy looked at him over the face without blinking.

- Is it true, sir, that you are a real band?

"Well, I say ... But it depends on which side are the people saying it. Right now I'm needing a bit of company and, you see, I'm not very dangerous as I am tied to the bed. Why not enter at all?

"Well ...

He hesitated and then with a sigh, and casting a furtive glance around, the boy slipped through a hole in the lattice.

"As you see, sir, I'm not afraid of anything, not even the bandits. I also handle a gun ... May I see his bullet wounds? Must have many

...

"For that you need to get closer or is it you fear?

- "Afraid? ... I have ten years and I'm a man.

Casting another glance back, the boy went into the room and without much conviction, he approached the bed until the smile of the blue-eyed foreigner totally disarmed him and he decided to return it.

"It seems that you are very serious, sir .Posó look at the bandages and the scar across his forehead, opening her eyes wide. Ouch! My grandfather says it's a miracle he's alive.

"Well, apparently, most likely will not stay alive much longer.

"I will hang, right? "It gives you fear?

"Not really, since I am prevented. What I want is to know what made them decide it is necessary to hang.

- Oh! You kill several men! So ... Bam, bam, bam! You are very quick to shoot, sir ... I'd like to learn someday.

"In your place I would not ... To not have you to do sometime in my situation ...

Then the question arose of itself:

"What I wonder is how they could hurt me so badly if I am as fast as they say. My memories are a bit confused ...

- Oh ... "But do not you know that you were waiting outside the saloon? I ... as I am but a child, no notice of me. I've heard about that. I heard them tell how they were going to fight the bad man, sent to kill them all. When you left the bar everyone started throwing the same time and then you also began to pull. It got a tremendous din ... Everyone pulled together.

-Auditors history very well, kid ... You'd think you were witnessing the ...

- Of course I was there! It was there, hiding, crushing the belly against the sidewalk. Twice I felt the bullets grazed the head but I got scared. The boss, Mr. Cady, ordered me to come and tell the lady who would be late but I stayed to see what happened. You fought very well, sir. I feel like I hit so many times.

"But to you amused to witness a real fight, eh? ... Did you tell someone what you saw?

With eyes round with terror, shook his head.

- Oh, no sir! My grandfather had struck and the lady had been furious. I'm not allowed to go only to people but Mr. Cady sometimes allowed me to accompany him to guide the car back home, when he drank too much tequila and wanted to sleep.

Nonsense! My grandfather had sent back to Mexico to live in Sonora with my aunt who has a bunch of kids and I would stick around. Now I gotta go, sir. Whip me if I knew also that I am here and also is calling me.

"Wait a minute ...

- I've been here! You did not see me! ...

The boy slipped out the window with the agility of a monkey, leaving Steven rage cursing to himself.

Damn ... A few minutes later and could perhaps convince the kid to repeat his story. But does she listen? Would she listen? It would be his word and that of the boy against all others, names that were probably predicament Prayers End-The End of Prayer, the final rope! ...

Suddenly he heard noises coming from outside. Sound of hoofs and voices of men shouting. Even a child's voice louder than the others. Visits ... For her or him?

More musings saved because the woman entered paler than usual. He was biting his lips. Came closely followed by four men among whom he recognized at least one: the swaggering bully of the tavern. Milt, others called him. Her eyes and those of women led him to realize that Steven was time. So she had gone to get them! The bitter rancor and bitter taste that Steven felt, did not translate at all in your face. Simply return the gaze coolly.

Kehoe was Milt who first spoke, his voice reflecting the suppressed excitement.

- Miracle to give her a bed! Shackled in the basement should be! It's the most he deserved such a coyote murderer!

- Well, we've all been waiting for this moment! I bet you do too, gringo! ...

- Stop! Shear said the woman.

Middle absent, Steven noticed how she twisted the corners of her apron still on the dress she wore faded cotton. His knuckles were red and rough as if he had finished washing at the time.

She said with energy:

"No need of ... all this. Going to be hanged and it is enough punishment.

It was all very confusing from the moment they dragged him out in handcuffs forward. He felt his body covered in sweat and cursing himself for his weakness made him stumble, as he was too sick to walk without support. Someone got into the back of a horse and tied him to the chair. Since then needed to use all his willpower to stand firm on the horse and not lose the pride. Each animal's movement seemed to have speared him in the body, much more painful than bullets before.

A few miles away, a larger group of men joined the procession. Elizabeth Cady was with that group, driving a light truck. Beside, the old Mexican with a bitter face full of stitches.

"Already ?»... But nothing mattered ... Just hoping to be lucky to break his neck at once.

- Lower the horse! Lige, why do not you untie and low? Let's do things with class.

The noose was put around his neck was Milt Kehoe. Amid the ominous silence that had occurred suddenly, an older man cleared his throat a little pregnant.

- Hold it, hold it! Perhaps we should find out his name or something ...

"Yes," someone said, then we could put a note on his body ...

Prendergast So know what can happen to any other shooter that sends us.

Steve felt twisted with rage, forgetting his weakness and nausea.

She lifted her head and, by coincidence, was the look of the woman who crossed his way, before she quickly departed the eyes.

"One thing I want to know," he said suddenly with serenity, silence all for a moment why I am going to hang?

Everyone was staring at him and their faces expressed varying degrees of anger and disbelief. Kehoe-was always in his role as spokesman for the group, who exploded angrily:

- What the fuck are you trying to accomplish? You know perfectly

well what you did, killing innocent men ...

"Since I was attacked first, how can you talk about murder? Or is it simply a lynch mob vengeance this feast?

- What do you mean? Kehoe shouted, his face covered in purple. By God, Lige and I were there and I threw about Jared without notice! Neither he nor Red, gave them a chance!

- Lie! I gotta get away from the fight that you had brought into the saloon to fall into the ambush that had prepared me out. And as for the rest of you, do not believe that we must judge a man or at least listen to all the witnesses present before assuming the responsibility of executing the sentence? I have been accused of being a hired gunman and murderer, without giving me a chance to defend myself. Did you do this to all foreigners who pass through here?

- Shit! Did not realize what you're trying to do? It is trying to gain time, that's all! And you, son of a bitch, I'll throw up your lies do! Steven noticed the change of timbre in the voice of Milt Kehoe, while the rope was squeezing his neck shaking him forward. He put handcuffs around his neck trying to grab the rope to loosen the terrible and suffocating pressure that suffocated him and felt her body suddenly fell to the ground.

I thought I heard distant cries of women.

- Oh, no, not like that! ...

He was lying on the floor, feeling that life left him slowly suffocate and die. Some ice cold hands touched her neck, she loosened the rope and finally could breathe again, breathing in deep gulps of air. Through the reddish haze that blinded him, could hear voices that seemed to tone up and down like the howling of the wind. Nothing he said made sense and nothing mattered. There was only one way to escape the pain that wrapped him in rhythmic waves: completing the die.

This time it was Martin Burneson-the most important of

smallholders, who, ignoring Milt Kehoe, took charge of the situation without listening to their taunts.

"Sorry I had to shoot your horse. I'll replace it for one of mine. But you had no right to do what you did. And he said this man whom we had all decided to hang, made me reflect a little. For example, how can we be so sure that is one of the men Prendergast? In addition he spoke of witnesses ...

- Are you doubting the word of Lige and mine to believe in him? By God, I hope to have killed him, that ... that ...!

Just then, the old Mexican who worked with Cady, dragged subject appeared, bringing the doll to its recalcitrant grandson.

-Fidelito was hidden under sacks in the truck-pulling said in explanation. This was not a spectacle to be witnessed by a child. But they also heard what this man, abroad, said y. .. said it was true. It was planned that many men were waiting for him outside the saloon, if those inside had failed to kill him.

- He's lying! Are you going to believe a Mexican brat? This old man is as crazy as his grandson!

- Milt Kehoe! If you calm down, I'll kill myself!

The face white as paper, clothes covered with blood mixed with the soil where he had been kneeling, Elizabeth Cady looked up silencing the vociferous Milt.

"For a short makes us all accomplices in a murder. I will say I believe what he says Fidelito. I ... God! I can not believe what I was about to do ... what we are about to do all ...

"I said briskly Martin Burneson what we have to do is call the sheriff. I need not tell you what we would do, but he can tell us for sure if this man is wanted.

- If you live! Milt Kehoe cried with evil.

Burneson nodded.

"Yes. If you live ... We are confident that the sheriff is a friend of ours. That is lucky for all of us and especially for you, Kehoe.

Chapter 28

The sheriff was lounging in his chair, thoughtfully stroking his auburn mustache when he saw Elizabeth.

"Well, Mrs. Cady ...

-Doc Wilson said ... told me he was here.

"Sit down, Lizzie, the chair is not so uncomfortable.

He sat wincing in disgust on hearing that he called by his hated nickname as a child, Liz ... Lizzie. What gave it the beautiful name of Elizabeth if anyone used it? Even Jared ... He closed his eyes for a moment to think of Jared and his large hazel eyes clashed with Sheriff Blaine.

He looked somewhat amused tolerance, still scratching his mustache, as if stung, with snuff-stained fingers.

- Do you see now? His tone was mocking, making you feel humiliated for having gone there. I feel good, "always looking at her that she hated tolerant air. Anyway I can not have much time here. As far as I could ascertain, he was not looking for either here or by his household gods. Of course that means nothing. Can be one of those renegades across the border to spend their lives crossing from one side to another, constantly changing name ... She almost had forgotten their mission, fascinated by the discourse of the sheriff.

- But the truth is a professional gunslinger? Is there no way you can find it at least?

- Without having to foist a name? The words he chose carefully, made her blush, but he continued judgmental, pretending not to notice. I do not know, Lizzie ... If I told you how much Johns Smith that I have met in life ... But if this man was indeed a professional killer, it would be reasonable to think that someone would have to know in these parts after the description have been circulated. I have also sent a cable to the headquarters in Austin, Texas Ranger, to be sure it comes from forests that knot. That's the best I could do ... But he can come from anywhere else and does not say where-.Le cast a furtive glance. He argues that the amount

of shots that put him has made him lose his memory. It can be a bum who just passed a guy here or escaped from an inmate, as does the doctor. What I think is that passed here by chance.

- No one comes along and you know it! He sprang it bitterly. Not wanting his eyes wandered over toward the dark sheriff passageway leading to the cells. He caught the eye and smiled benevolently.

"Look, Lizzie," she said gently and energy, have no right to prevent him from doing what you want. Is alive and able to travel and, if it has search and seizure, there my responsibility. But if I were you ... -. He noted the firmness of the expression of that face of high cheekbones and sighed. It is to worry ... At my age and my time in this job, a man guess certain things. Do not know where it comes from or who he is, but I can tell if an individual is dangerous and this one is. I would have preferred to continue his path and out of our territory. We have enough problems and I am old, Lizzie ...

"I'm just asking to speak with him, Sheriff Blaine.

She would not give his voice was sharp.

He sighed and reached for his key ring.

"Well ...

He rose from his chair and Lizzie followed him, staying by his side with head slightly bowed as he opened the door leading to the dungeons. At that time he lowered his voice and blurted out:

"Prendergast yesterday sent one of his boys asking him data, description and other ... Why can not you do us all a favor and persuade him to go from here? The answer to the telegram that began to arrive in Austin at any moment, and then I can release him.

She also answered quietly but firmly:

- Did not occur to him that he may have other plans? He ambushed and nearly killed him ... After we hang by little. If it really is the kind of man you think ...

"It's possible that he decided simply to thank have come alive.

After all, you saved his life, is not it?

She screamed an 'oh' mixture of desperation and helplessness.

The sheriff shrugged and said:

"Talk to him then if he feels forced and is decidedly .and grumbling continued," The Lord knows I do not want him involved in this war on the side of Prendergast ... Shit ... I do not see it mixed with either side!

Lizzie did not give the satisfaction of giving aware of what he said. Blaine shrugged with resignation and let it go before him down the dark corridor where they gave the three cells.

Elizabeth had not felt the slightest fear when he entered the sheriff's office, encouraged by her confidence in herself and the new black taffeta dress, not very appropriate to "take a walk by the people" in the car. He even had made a different pick up the hair combed in a single braid that hung down her back, exposing his neck and small ears, earrings adorned with jet that had belonged to her mother. She was convinced of the legitimacy of its purposes. After all, someone should be responsible to inform everyone how much regretted the error. And she was the most appropriate, to show that not blamed for the death of Jared. We also had to take account of the mission entrusted to him. Their status as women, did not prevent to take responsibility as the owner of a ranch.

His reflections on the subject had stopped while he was forced to sit in an uncomfortable chair in the sheriff's office, forced to listen to their warnings of doom that no one had asked.

But now that she was locked in the small cell alone with him, all his confidence waned, and for a moment, to those dark blue eyes looked at her without expression, was not what to say. I hardly noticed that the sheriff was gone, after notice as urge that would come out.

He did not make things easy. He lay on the narrow cot, his back against the wall. One of his long legs dangling off the mattress covered with a blanket, on which carelessly threw the greasy playing cards. When the sheriff made it happen, slowly stood up

without his face showed the slightest surprise. His eyes, by a cautious time, immediately became impassive.

Neither said a word until the sheriff had gone and heard the door close outside. Elizabeth stood with his stiff taffeta dress, feeling suddenly ridiculous, knowing that it was obvious that just premiered. His fingers played nervously with the cameo that had set as a brooch in the high collar of her dress. He was suddenly panicked and wanted to go back and run the sheriff's demand for safety. Embarrassed, he realized that he had escaped what she was feeling.

She lifted her head and met his lips tight on him, mocking stretched in almost imperceptible. You guessed ... Oh, God, it is possible that he was thinking about her ... the unforeseen and unwanted memories of that night in the bedroom ... night lamp, when he kissed her, all her memory again making her blush. He felt the sweat running down his neck and angrily asked, "Why do not you say something, why not me I get a word in the body?"

- Have you ever played solitaire?

It was he who broke the silence abruptly ending to collect the dirty letters that were lying haphazardly on the bed.

"No, I ... I've never played cards.

The involvement of the unconscious woman's voice, made him smile. She turned to her pulling the deck to a corner of the cell where, in falling, struck by a crack that made him wince.

- Are you playing the role of a God-fearing lady?

He said without bothering to conceal the sarcastic tone of the sentence. Anger made her recover and returned his gaze without fear and without holding down his eyes.

He was wearing a faded blue shirt of coarse cloth with open collar and slacks of a darker blue. In the dim light that filtered through the barred window, was noticed the shadows of the bristles of his beard and, when he laughed, as now, amused at seeing him, were emboldened-deep wrinkles in the thin cheeks, and in a of them, a thin scar piratical highlighted the malignancy of his face.

'Dangerous', had called the sheriff and she admitted that he had always thought that was true, even if weak and sick, who knows what things faltered during his delirium.

He had stayed too long looking very embarrassed and said:

"I ... I'm glad he's better.

The phrase sounded harsh and affected, even to herself.

- Oh, I'm cured! Nonchalantly replied, and turning to be ironic.

Can you believe it? The sheriff talks about letting me go.

"That's why ... from what I've come to talk to you .Dejó escape the words, obviously ashamed of what had been nervous. Have you thought about where he's going? "O. .. what will you do?

"I think you're still thinking Prendergast-.Levantó an eyebrow in response to the sudden look of surprise" Sheriff Blaine told me that someone has been asking about me.

"I ... I do not know what to think ... I ... all very sorry about what happened ...

- All? Do you speak Kehoe also Milt?

He said it with such violence that frightened contained.

To hide his fear, he replied curtly:

"Milt was sure you were one of the gunmen who had sent for Prendergast ... And I am sure that Jared thought the same. I'm not saying their behavior was right or fair but ... you can not imagine how scared ... I would panic, can affect people. And we all lived under the threat of fear and violence for too long. Do you think a mistake to confront violence with violence?

"For a God-fearing lady, you speak too much of the violence.

He had narrowed his eyes and the statement dropped like a stone between the two.

Now that he was enraged, nothing of what he said was going to cower.

"Okay ... But you could have come here to work with them. That is spoken throughout the territory. Why would not you be one of those beasts that are prepared to kill anyone for a good pay?

- That entitled him to the hunters to exterminate without bothering

to find out if it was true? Is that what you mean?

- No! "She violently wondering how he managed to put him forever out of place.

He struggled to dominate the mix of emotions that he awoke, wishing he could see his face closer to study its expression. Why was the blue of his eyes a barrier to poderle read thoughts? There should be an explanation.

"Elizabeth, hearing himself called by his full name, left her paralyzed, you have not come here to play with me, right? Why did you come?

His voice had become imperceptibly gentle, leaving her speechless. How could I tell? Would you make an open offer? What would he think that he had come? Y. .. How dare to call her Elizabeth?

Determined to resist his attempt to disarm it.

"I came to talk to you.

No sooner had he said he realized he had put too much emphasis on the word 'talk' and also by the flicker of his eyes, he knew that he had noticed. He went quickly, before you fail the determination

...

"We ... I wanted to explain how things are here y. .. y. .. make an offer.

He was said! And now that the words were uttered, looked down at the tellers, cold and merciless eyes off him.

"Well ... I think that explanations have been given ... It is thus the proposition, is not it?

His voice had become sarcastic, dragged the words with deliberate intent:

"I must confess that any proposition that makes me a pretty woman, I find it hard to resist ...

Elizabeth took a step toward that, by instinct, he leaned back, feeling threatened by its proximity. He felt an uncontrollable desire to turn around and run to call the sheriff. Instead he made a supreme effort to stay put and deal with their mocking eyes and

impenetrable.

"Sir ...

He pretended to be cold and sharp but the lack of a name to address him formally disarmed and left, angry, felt his voice trembled.

"You ... purposely intended not understand you. You're not a gentleman!

He dropped the words with a sneer on his lips. After missing the gesture, and seeing that he narrowed his eyes and hardening his gaze, she realized he was preparing to attack. I was so close she could feel the warmth emanating from his body, and the manly smell of sweat that covered him. And she could not speak, could not make any resistance movement if he ... if he ...

"Well ... What will you do now? Will you just tell me what that interesting proposition which has for me? Or going to scream that she was raped at her fat sheriff providing an excuse to keep me locked up here? He came to visit me for that, Elizabeth? Decked with that new dress and petticoats rustling underneath leading ... and the cameo ...

He went further and touched the pin, leaving her paralyzed with terror, transfixed like a rabbit.

- Do you put out there, just at the neckline, to entice men to start it and then unbutton one by one, all those little buttons, to see how your breasts? My God! Even with that widow costume, high neckline and long sleeves, you're damned attractive. Tell me, "softened his voice with which she felt much more threatened," are you part of the proposition that they asked me to do? For in that case, it is likely that you will get me to consider ...

He went down very slowly the fingers from the beating of the neck to the waist, shaping the curves of her breasts. And then, when he was about to throw herself into his arms when he regained his lucidity.

Elizabeth retreated to the bars of his cell door, feeling stuck in her back through the tight corset.

- Oh, no! "His broken whisper would be an accusation. What do you take me?

He stared a moment, without trying to touch her, then turned with a shrug, which angered her more than the previous developments had offended.

"I suppose I took for a woman. But she must have forgotten. You are obviously a pious, God-fearing lady. Well ... then ...

It seemed incredible! He was lying on the bed full length and looked at her with his arms folded behind his head.

"I can not invite her to sit because the only place available is this bed infectious. And the situation seems very respectable if the sheriff comes up to enter ... And I suppose, above all, you must be kept respectable considering his recent widowhood and other ... So ... Why do not you follow through with the proposal and once finished? This is ... provided that opinion has not changed.

He was still standing, leaning against the cell door, watching him and not believing what his eyes saw.

- Oh! But you ... you ...

"It has been sufficiently proven that I am a gentleman. And probably I am a professional gunman and murderer for hire. But it is possible that that is precisely what you came for. Are you?

If it was not at his mocking glance have seemed a shameful surrender, had called the sheriff and had left with his head held high. But she had gone there with the purpose and would not allow others thought he had failed, only because they are women and because the man had abused their position to humiliate her. So Elizabeth met as could the remains of his pride and looked at him coldly.

- Are you sure you want to hear me yet? After all Prendergast can offer much more than what we can offer us.

- Again Prendergast? Well, I can not really say what my response to an offer from them, until they know yours. Do not you think? His insufferable gall to lift one of his eyebrows to emphasize his teasing and indolent manner of speaking, by boiling with anger.

Indignantly crossed the cell and stood beside the bed riddled with eyes throwing sparks.

- You! ... What kind of man are you to be pleased with the power that gives us to fight each other? Or is this the way you take us for fools? Everything he has done is take me for a fool from the moment I walked in here. I thought him an offer on behalf of small ranchers and owners of the area ... Decent, hardworking people who settled here legally without asking anything but to live in peace and make an honest living. We have water and share it. We have fences to protect the property. Prendergast think you need all these ranches, all this land to raise cattle. And is trying to evict us with barbed wire and their hired thugs. Prendergast claims to have sent the railway far to drive their cattle to market. He says the town is also his y. .. y. .. But I guess none of this matters to you, right? I came to ask you a honest and decent proposal, but I imagine that Prendergast made before. Was that the reason of his coming? Why not say from the beginning? Has been a pleasure for you to insult and humiliate me?

The tears blinded and gasping for breath, pivoted away from him but with amazing rapidity, Steven jumped out of bed like a cat by grabbing her wrist and forced her to turn around again.

- Go! What a temper you had hidden underneath her prim look! Did he leave without telling you exactly what kind of wanted to offer me his friends?

She looked through her moist eyes and he smiled.

"That's better. At least he has started screaming yet. And you have initiative. That I can tell.

The surprise again. His voice was urging her to not disturb flattering.

"Look ... Would you want to start over? Sit down and I'm standing here. And I promise that I will hear everything you have to say. I will not say a word until you're done. Do we agree?

He noticed that she hesitated and winked mischievously.

"I mean really. I've been forgetting that it was you who saved my

life when everything seemed to expect that I would die. I think I owe more than the tacky insults that I have addressed.

How easy is it to disarm and to make her feel guilty ... The truth is that she had saved his life just so he could be hanged. Now he had returned the dignity and reminded him what his mission with the same skill with which a few minutes earlier had brought to the brink of hysteria.

Without knowing yet how to respond to his new role, Elizabeth walked stiffly toward the bed covered with a filthy blanket and sat rigidly on the edge, looking with suspicion even though he had stationed a few feet away. Steven leaned his shoulder against the adobe wall, his eyes inscrutable as ever.

Elizabeth found it difficult to return to collect his thoughts and words so carefully studied. Bitterly regretted having come but too late for regrets ... The truth is he was there. And as he felt cornered and awkward, decided to speak with more spontaneity and simplicity in mind. He tried to be concise and brief as it would be a man. When she finished her hands demurely folded in her lap and waited for his answer.

- Is Kehoe of you?

The question caught off guard, making him open his eyes with a feeling of guilt.

-Milt Kehoe is a member of our Association. But ... But I asked you to assure him there would be no more problems. It is foolish and hasty but knows he needs to the Association. Yes, I'm sure it will not cross into his path.

- What if I cross with whoever wanted it?

His words were a challenge but, this time, Elizabeth was ready to answer:

"If Milt Kehoe pretend to create problems, he knows that act at their own risk. You know very well.

"Do you have answered my question.

She blushed as she felt her blue eyes fixed on her, but shrugged it saved him the answer.

"Well ... I guess what you have said enough ...

"Then ... then, do you agree?

- Wait! Not so fast! ...

Almost angry split from the wall and started walking along the cell. His quick, nervous steps reminded her to a caged animal.

- Why are you so sure we need a hired gun? And in any case, where did they get the idea that I'm a gangster? Dammit! Now everyone carries a gun! Even the reps ...

"The sheriff believes that you are. And also ... Fidelito ... Fidelito says that while you attacked him by surprise, has never seen anyone handle a gun like you did.

- And how many shooters have seen the boy? Damn! Panic makes any man drew a gun at a speed like never have believed it could. With his head tilted to one side she looked at him thoughtfully.

"I do not think that is your case. You are ... is a ...

- "A murderer? A bully? She stopped walking and looked at her with a gesture of contempt, pointing with his hand to be quiet at the time she would reply. Okay ... It's just their female instinct. You may be right. But you know you and your friends in the Association as they are getting into? If I decide to break the horns in this war that you are organizing here, you may jump the magazine and once to jump, there is no way to stop the explosions. There will be death and destruction, resentment and pain on both sides. Have you ever been involved in a war between ranchers? Do you have any idea of what can be?

- Have you been involved in any? Was it that what he was fleeing when he turned up here?

Elizabeth was found that a mask suddenly fell off the face of man, making a face of stone, before he made a strange gesture with his hand as if to erase any bad memories of his past.

"Okay. Touché.

A slightly inquisitive look she did frown.

"It strikes me that you do not understand French. You mean ...

Dammit! ... no matter ... That's the whole, Mrs. Cady.

She became overly formal.

"No need to take oaths. Neither testing me or scare me with bad omens. Do not you think that we've discussed all this? And what we've thought? What we have already tormented enough? We know what it means war between ranchers. But there is something called pride and desire to defend what is ours. If you do not show them that we are ready to fight back if they force us to do so, we ... Finally, we will go over and erased from the map as we have already done elsewhere. So we formed the Association.

The blue of her eyes shone like steel.

- Ah, yes, your Association! Were you told that I realized what could happen if you do not accept your proposal? I'd hate to not return to being the main attraction in a lynching or in an ambush. Elizabeth blushed and stood up tangling with the long skirt.

- It's not that! I told you that is free to decide to want and nobody will stop him go, if you decide to leave rather than stay and be involved in this mess.

- "So that's the choice? Stay on your side or leave town ...

"It's a proposition quite honestly, is not it? "She retorted mocking her and her wrinkled old pirate became even deeper.

"I think so. Especially since his point of view. OK, Mrs. Cady, think about it.

- Do you think? "For a moment he could not conceal his deep disappointment, before forced to answer coldly polite and unconcerned: Oh, okay, it's nothing more than fair! I will talk to the sheriff of the case ... Blaine

- "Since when is going to release? I would like to do it. It is really very boring to spend all day playing solitaire.

He called the sheriff down the hall and suddenly, by surprise, lifted his chin with his finger.

- Ah! A final condition ...

- Please! She said anxiously to hear the squeak of the gate that opened.

He laughed.

"Come get me. And put this dress. It looks very good.

Sheriff Blaine was in good spirits when he appeared deaf to move forward with steps down the corridor to open the cell door. A folded piece of yellow paper sticking out of his breast pocket of his waistcoat.

"Well, well ... Have you had a pleasant interview, Mrs. Cady?

Blaine recovered formality. She lifted her chin to her overly solicitous smile.

"Thanks, Sheriff Blaine.

Elizabeth hoped that he would bolt the door after she passed, but for some reason, stood there, smiling satisfied the prisoner, and she was forced to wait.

"I have good news for you, whatever his name is called," Smith said? -. Given that the prisoner did not react continued: "Well, you got the telegram that he hoped Austin, Texas, and it seems that you are clear of all suspicion ... At least they have no criminal record-. Sus his clumsy fingers touched the paper in his pocket and shook his head. The truth is that it seems weird. He telegraphed his full description and apparently never heard of you.

If I understand correctly, you may come from the south side of the border. The Rangers are not looking and as far as I could ascertain, you are not a gunslinger. So ...

- Is he telling you, sheriff, I can leave here now?

His deadpan voice seemed languid, carefree but Elizabeth could not throw a sideways glance a little alarmed. If you were free, would not rule out the idea of staying with them? It is possible that this was a private matter between the hard-featured man and the sheriff but she was determined to stay and listen. Why not?

"Well, I think it falls within my expectations," said the sheriff with reluctance. Will you go to my office and sign the minutes of its release?

The sheriff started walking toward the office but left politely Elizabeth Steven precede. She noted that these small gestures made automatically, by habit. It was strange that excessive contrast

with the unbridled violence civility that shone on it. She was fully aware of the tall man who followed her with long strides. And, when the sheriff opened the door a push outside, he leaned into his ear and whispered:

- Are not you going to be to wait?

Elizabeth was left not knowing what to do. If she returned to the ranch alone, was more than certain that the men of Prendergast would be contacting him. Or that he decided to leave with them directly. After all, what he knew, neither she nor any of his friends and neighbors?

Indecisive and stupid, appeared to be absent and the concentration was looking too far corner of the sheriff's desk.

"Of course not much above what you had when they brought him here, but Mrs. Cady has been kind enough to bring their guns. You can take them back.

The sheriff opened a cupboard with glass doors and pulled out two revolvers and two twin cartridge sheathed, which glowed ominously black handles.

"It would be nice to have some name to put here in this paper ...

The man looked up from revolvers, to which was examined carefully.

- Ah ... Did you forget? John Smith-.and added with an amused glance of her blue eyes: Anything else?

With the same fear that at first, mixed with some bitterness, Elizabeth watched many domains, danger and efficiency drove the man's weapons. He had adjusted the cartridge belt by dropping the hips so that he receives, and thigh. Too well he remembered the moment he took the same cartridge to his lifeless body, with such a feeling of repulsion threw it away. Had insisted that only the Save it for the sheriff and prevent Milt Kehoe nab them.

Now the man who had used those guns, turned the drum with great competition. Replacing spent cartridges, still frowning.

"They are very modern guns, right?" Said the sheriff in a spirit of open conversation. Colts saw that it was but I never seen that

model.

-Colt 44, Model 73.

He said mechanically.

- Go, then nothing! He added, as casually: "I hope not intending to use them in these parts. Are you off already, no? His horse is still in the stable. Remember what? I mean, surely there is nothing to hold you here any longer ...

The mocking Mr. Smith became even more evident.

Chapter 29

What is least expected by members of the new Association of Smallholders, saw him that night was at the meeting. But Elizabeth did not have much room to decide and it led directly to Dean Frank house, where he was conducting the meeting. To cap the night the crowd was larger and was more animated than usual, Elizabeth thought with disgust, trying to avoid the gaze of censure directed to Millie, wife of Frank.

"Things have to get my way," warned John Smith, adding, "and I'm not going to admit them to question my methods.

He softened his voice a little, looking with some disdain and measuring them with the eyes.

"Do you like me, that's obvious. I'm a beast for you. But I need ... to me or to another like me, are we? So you can keep your hands clean.

"Well, sir ...

The phrase hesitant to pronounce the little Brad wanted to show his wrath Newbury disagreement, was cut in his throat. Smith continued as if he had not heard:

"Now let's talk about my fee ...

"Well," Frank Dean cleared his throat in a hurry, we've talked about it and we are all willing to make our contribution in this regard. Come over here and do the collection, we have enough heads to ...

Trabársele the words began to see that Smith staring at Elizabeth

Cady.

- And you, madam?

She was ashamed to realize that the flush betrayed her.

"I still do not know how am I going to pick ... but I ...

As if he had suddenly lost interest, turned, glancing through the rest of the people.

"Now that I've heard the proposal from you, I will make mine.

They can take it or leave.

He took time to light a cigarette, casually pulling off the match between the booted feet of Milt Kehoe. This flushed, rolled his eyes but said nothing.

All watched the tall man who was a drag of his cigarette to keep them guessing. Finally he looked up.

"I'll do a defensive plan after spending a few days exploring the surroundings. I need all the maps that you can get. But remember that every man must play his part. And remember also what I told you. I do not want to hear complaints ... No, get it right?, On my way to war. I count on you, citizens, without blemish, to clarify things with the sheriff.

The acrimony of his words was an affront to his pride but everyone shook their heads in assent, and Frank asked hesitantly

"But ... What about your fees? ... I still have not told us ...

Smith shrugged.

"For starters, food and ammunition. And I'll need a new Winchester. We also require of five dollars per month to each of you and a percentage of what they take out of the crops. But only in the case of me being able to direct them to arrive safely to the reservoirs.

Those who were standing in the back of the small room began to murmur among themselves and he raised an eyebrow. Milt Kehoe was unable to remain silent, who said belligerently:

- By God! Most of us can pay that money if we have to ... But some, like Felix and Lizzie here, have no where to get ... You mean

...

"That's going. Felix can give me horses. I need a couple of good horses in addition to me ... "He paused before continuing intentional and, as Mrs. Cady ...

For the first time Elizabeth received the frontage of his blue eyes, forcing it very reluctantly, to meet her gaze.

"I think I can enjoy the pleasures of the cuisine and the diligent attention they gave me during my illness. It was she who asked me to attend this meeting. So his involvement in the business can be stammered, half smiling to see the expressions astonished and upset by all present. She blushed again bravely trying to hold his gaze. I'll have room and board at home. Takes place, right?

Besides, Mrs. Cady needs a man to take care of their things.

Holding her breath Elizabeth tried to face the reality of what he was suggesting. Once again it was Milt Kehoe who was ahead of the group, disgusted and angry.

- Damn! ... Will all of you to also accept this? Even for a man of his ilk, is going too far.

Are we going to let him talk like a woman without raising my voice?

- Milt! Elizabeth's voice, steady and calm, stopped him cold.

Kehoe Milt, you are allowing me to speak on my own, do me a favor. I am a free woman who can do my own will ... And I ... I accept ... "stumbled over the words, struggling desperately to avoid being put back so as not to betray red itself, the proposal that Mr. Smith has done. We are all in this and I want to do my part. I insist upon it ...

- Do I understand that is all settled?

In the midst of her confused emotions, while Elizabeth felt indignation and shame at his friends nervous posture-changing murmured quietly without ever making objections or her eyes. He heard Steven's voice as cold and dispassionate when he had been told what would and what would-and she was relieved.

"I think it's time to take her home. If I remember correctly we still have a long way to make and I'm hungry.

He took her by the arm just below the elbow and left with her to the surprise and the astonished eyes of all, none of which made no move to stop it.

Elizabeth had not welcomed him Fidelito Domingo asked to accompany her to the house of Dean because he would not return alone. He insisted that the talkative boy traveled with them in the car. She felt sick to nausea wondering what would have happened if the kid had not spoken in time ... Sometimes a few words were enough to ...

He began to speak by speaking, just for the pleasure of hearing his own voice, and his smile that deepened the wrinkles around the mouth, he knew that Mr. Smith did not miss what was his mood. He offered no objection to accompany the child and began to talk to him in good Spanish, and was rewarded by a steady chatter that just ended, much to his chagrin, when they reached the house and Sunday came heavily to disengage the horses, asking his grandson to help him because he was no longer a young man and needed a hand.

She did not want his people to go and leave alone! The grip of his hands around his waist when he had helped lower the car, had to let her breath again and moved in the depths of his being. Almost running up the steps leading to the house to get away from him, but tripped over a tree and fell against the man.

- Attention! Why not let me pass to me before?

He spoke casually but had taken no hand take notice of her efforts to extricate himself.

"I know the road. If not for this blessed skirt ...

"I'm glad not wearing bustles-.Ahora seemed impatient. Come on!

He tried to back with the nerves to jump.

"But ... but no light. I ... I lit a lamp.

- Why?

In a push had opened the door and brutal of the question startled her.

- I see nothing! I have to ...

Under the guise of your trampled words, the heart was pounding his temples. My God ... What did do with it? Bumping into furniture crossed an open door, he closed with his foot behind them and found themselves in the darkness of her bedroom. Does your bedroom?

- No! ...

But he said the word too late and died in her throat as he clutched in his arms, kissing her savagely, mercilessly, until she threw her head back weakly, feeling that his body turned into that of a doll rubber, unable to react.

Holding her breath, Elizabeth felt his hands down her back and fingers were torn between buttons and brooches. No, he yelled a voice from himself, and not knowing how or where he took strength to push it with both hands, then falling back against the wall.

- No! "She finally gasped say, what are you doing?

A faint light began seeping through the lattice. The old man had lighted the lamps in the kitchen and fanned the flames. And he, his silhouette against the window, she was taking off the belt and unbuttoning his shirt.

- You want me to undress me? We will go faster if you do it yourself, and also refused to ruin the dress. But hurry! For Christ! I think that all my life I been waiting for the moment to make her mine!

The more he came in choppy waves emotions: surprise, terror, anger that left her stunned.

- What? What he is saying?

- Why waste time on games elusive? You know from the start I wanted ... Right? Remove clothing and get into bed, Elizabeth. Unless you do prefer that my feet.

She had thrown her clothes aside and came towards her when her voice rising hysterically stopped him.

- You! What kind of man are you? How dare you assume ... you bought me just as if it were a ... a ...! Begone! Do you hear? Leave

immediately in my bedroom o. .. o. ..

He stood looking at her. In the dark his words came to her cold and hard.

"I thought you had understood what I said there. Damn! Are you a woman or not? You knew, damn it! ... I think my words were quite explicit ... Elizabeth, I want her! What did you expect from me? A long courtship, perhaps? Or a marriage proposal before sharing a bed? "Thus conscience reassure an honest woman, afraid of God? The brutality of his words filled her eyes with tears but also gave strength to keep fighting.

- "And you do not mind that I did not want? No, I think you do not care about anything other than satisfy his whims, trampling on everyone else if necessary without worrying about people's feelings or anything ... Is not that right? I have not given any reason for that would result could crawl up here and treat me like the kind of woman with whom you are obviously used to dealing. I'm not part of his salary, Mr. ... I'll give you shelter and food, I'll wash and sew her clothes but I ... I am still master of myself.

Confronted him clenching his fists and flashing from his eyes, waiting in fear her reaction, hoping to guess what he was going through your head at that time. But when he finally spoke, could not help but wonder. The anger and passion had gone from his voice and spoke without emotion but with sweetness. He guessed that he shuddered before saying:

"Okay.

Then, to his surprise, he picked up his shirt and threw the strap over his shoulder as she watched him, unable to believe his eyes.

"Sorry. I have imagined many things ... lady.

When he turned to leave, Elizabeth recalled unclear why he was there and before he could stop, he found, saying:

"You were ..." was cut, biting her lip.

- Are you going to allow use of the room I had before or would you prefer that I stay outside?

(The same indifference as before. What capacity had to change the

mood!)

"You can use the room. I changed the sheets.

When I saw him open the door squeezed her mouth with his hands, stifling a groan that made him turn around.

"I would eat something, if not too much trouble. The food that the sheriff served in prison is not good either for the dogs.

After leaving left staring at the door had closed behind him carefully.

She began to perform small tasks as if sleepwalking evening. He lit the lamps, put more wood in the huge fireplace. She rubbed her bare arms that had cooled with the freezing air. Neatly folded black taffeta dress and placed it in the beautiful cedar chest of drawers. As if to punish himself, was old and shabby dress.

As was addressing dinner available, reproaching wondered to himself: "Why did you have to wear that dress? Could it be that you are very vain, Elizabeth Cady Merrill? You were there to seduce ... no. No, not that! Just wanted to be nice. That was all. It had nothing to do with him. Do not even like. I do not trust him. He's a loner, like wolves. He should not have accepted to come here. What are they thinking now everyone else? "

He broke one of his favorite sources, of the few that remained of the game given away by her mother. It burned his fingers on the edge of the stove and he shed tears of pain.

What am I doing? I must be crazy! Leaving him get to where they have not arrived and slapped! ... And now I'm making dinner ... "

Despite this, she took off her apron she wore and hung on a nail behind the door, before looking out into the yard to call:

- Dinner is ready!

Made possible because the natural-sounding voice. It was probable that he had not heard. Or not to come. The faint sound of footsteps around the bomb that was heard behind the door announced her presence. He came on as if nothing had happened, very polite, as any outsider who had been invited to share dinner.

"Really, it smells good. I've been looking around a bit and can say

that you have a nice extension. The house has good, solid walls if they ever had to defend the Indians. However, I have seen that there are some things to do.

He bent to sit in a chair. She began to serve the dish with a slight tremor in his hands, unable to conceal the astonishment caused him to see him perform so naturally.

"I ... I know that there is much to do. The pen is falling apart. But I only have Fidelito Domingo and lots of things to take care ...

She sat across from him, wiping her hands on the sides of the skirt, without thinking of her apron. He kept talking quickly, trying to avoid your questions.

"We used to have three men working for us, but since I started frequenting Jared Kehoe and that such Milt Burton Talley ... He was no friend to frequent the taverns or play. He had an education even more severe than mine! But this is all so different from what was my house ... For a woman, I am quite strong and, except in time of the marauders did not need more help. I ...

He had been talking without stopping, trying not to have to look at him but was cut by remembering that the man sitting across from her was precisely the one that killed her husband. How strange life was! How many things could come to happen in a moment!

Fortunately for his restless mood he showed to have realized that she had been cut off and continued eating with good appetite, after one long look whose meaning could not decipher.

"You're a good cook," she said after a brief pause.

To which she replied with a bland "thank you".

What Elizabeth wanted most was to remain silent.

He seemed willing to give until it was greatly relieved when-it-to clear the table. John Smith then asked if he had to drink something stronger than coffee.

With raised eyebrow, pursed lips, Elizabeth turned things stored away in a cupboard, trinkets and souvenirs from St. Louis and Kansas tops bizarre forms that once were beautiful and said:

"I'd rather not drink this disgusting concoction at home, if you

please.

He said stiffly, giving a full bottle in his three quarters of whiskey, as if afraid of being contaminated.

I can not bear strong drink, "he said angrily when he saw that he pressed his lips, but Jared always maintained that we should have some for when friends come.

"A sighted man to some extent, its Jared ...

He made the ironic comment as he poured the whiskey into the cup of coffee, staring crafty and ready to strike back with the girl.

"Do not drink here, but if I may, I'm going to keep the bottle in sight that you do not like.

He said in one breath and then lit a cigarette which probably gave him his well-guarded Sunday provision.

She thought to protest again but he got up and started walking impatiently about the room, putting nervous.

- Do you have a map? He asked suddenly.

"This ... I really do not know, "said .Lo as embarrassed as he tried to keep busy looking for a dry cloth. Jared had a stack of papers ... They are still there, in a box in the corner. I have not had time to take care of them when I am ...

"Well, you had better be given time to do it," he said, adding without ceremony, "I think I'm going for a walk around. I'll finish this fine cigar, give me a drink and wash at the pump a bit before re-entry.

- Oh! She blushed and was angered by leave it pointed out. Well, "he said over his shoulder, "I will be careful to set foot outside until you are finished. Although, if you prefer, you could warm some water.

Heartedly offered it, knowing it was his duty to do so.

"There's an old bathtub, which I use sometimes stored in the pantry.

She glanced maliciously enjoying seeing her uncomfortable.

"Thank you, ma'am. But the cold water and fresh air are made for me. But I'm not allowed to interrupt his bath, if I thought give it.

Return to my room through the window to not disturb her.

It seemed to bend his head in a lewd and clawed for restraint. He would have liked to throw the dirty rag over his head and tell him to bathe him. But it was not an attitude worthy of a Christian or a lady and also should not let him see that I could annoy or put it into ridicule when he wanted. Thank the good Lord would not have to see him again that day!

He had the whole night ahead of her own. She relished the idea while walking without any special intention for the living room she had insisted that Jared was added to the house. With a little sadness wondered why he had not ever sit there again. There was the book he had promised to finish reading, with its blue ribbon marking the page where he had stopped reading. And the picture of Mom and Dad's wedding ... his room. The family room. But it was completely closed and smelled a bit musty from disuse. And that night I had the mind to stay there alone, sitting in his rocking chair, trying to enter a world that was not theirs and would never know completely. Jared did not like his wife read novels. Many times he had lectured and had even spoken with the pastor to convince him that the reading of these books may suggest ideas ... Ideas that could awaken the devil in all of us ...

No, thought Elizabeth closed the door firmly behind her. This night did not want to sit in the room. Of course I had to do was get into bed. But the conversation about the bathroom, made her feel dirty, sweaty and uncomfortable with his shabby old garment. For more than a week since it really took a bath. And she liked to do often. That was his only luxury, besides reading.

Why not? For once it would be nice to get into bed fresh and clean. It would be nice to remove the dust and dirt from the hair. It required much effort to drag the tub to her bedroom and, like the kitchen was still on and a pot of boiling water on the stove was still not take him long to have the bath ready. He left the door and the window closed and only the coals of the home that was facing the bed, dimly lit room. No more was needed and it was not too

long sitting in the bathtub, listening to the splashing of water outside and trying to ignore it, humming and rubbing the skin with force.

The bathrooms should be by necessity, not pleasure. Forcing herself to be disciplined, Elizabeth finished showering before the water had had time to cool. It dried quickly before the fire and wrapped in a loose robe that barely adjusted to the waist. After throw more fuel on the fire, brushed her hair and got it back with a ribbon tying. "There!" Said satisfied. The bath and a steaming cup of lime, would make her sleep at once, as soon as he had emptied the tub. I'm sorry I dragged to the bedroom to ensure privacy. Now I had to choose between empty or found the next day with dirty, soapy water.

"The now pour and finish once, he thought, fighting the tub into the kitchen, pausing occasionally to take breath and listen. The only sound was the slow boil of the kettle cornered in the back of the stove. The sound had stopped outside. Except for the howl of a coyote, there was complete tranquility.

Just a few steps and could open the door to the kitchen and dump the tub to empty. Probably because I was too concentrated effort, did not hear until it was there at his side, stretching his arms for help and saying impatiently:

- Why not call to ask me to help him with this?

Almost died of fright, but not going to admit to his heart was beating so hard that he dared not speak and he just shook his head, pushing the tub under the sink and straightening up to face him, only to realize that his heart beat louder and louder as if it had been long running.

As he was naked to the waist, it was easy to see the target of some scars on brown skin stood out.

Startled, Elizabeth became aware of his own nakedness beneath her robe, and the blood rushed to his face flush tiñendosela while hair dries, you will begin to curl.

She looked. He was standing between her and the bedroom door

open, with closed eyes so that he could not see. Nervously, Elizabeth leaned back a rebellious lock of hair. He licked his lips. "Well, I go to my room. Want more coffee? Whenever you give a little in that pileup but it gets too strong ...

"You know what I want ...

Was it close enough to him by the hair ribbon and drop it to cover her shoulders like a dark cloud and bright. He played with the fingers, gently touched his face, he slid his hand to the shoulder and from there ... It seemed as if the gown is loosen one, running down the body when he took the only step that was missing to make it despite his own.

Was that what she was secretly waiting for? Why this time did not defend? With naked breasts, nipples vibrating against the rough hair of his body and kisses ... his kisses were now tender and followed her, Elizabeth was the illusion that was just comforting. Do not know what was happening but, whatever was happening in the depths of his being. It was like running water content long, suddenly found an outlet. His hands were stroking her back up and down and the gown had been wrapped around the ankles. She murmured incoherent to support the lips in his mouth and he lifted her and pressing her against his body, carried it briskly through the open door to her bedroom, throwing on the bed that she might have waited. He turned his face to avoid seeing the eyes that looked and closing his own to protect them from the lamp he had lit a few minutes before.

- Please! ", He said the lamp ...

Without a word, access your order jerky, he blew out. Elizabeth became aware of his movements in the dark red of the burning logs. He barely had time to wonder what he was doing in desperation there with him, what could he do, when he came near her, now naked and pressed hard against her body while she was shaking with chills and chattering teeth.

- By ... please! ... I'm not ... I have not ...

His mouth crushed against hers and his hands explored and gave

him heat. Slowly, slowly, softly, as if he would memorize every part of your body. She began to squirm under him, gasping and trying to slip away. It was wrong what he was doing! Jared did not even dared to touch her so intimately. This man kissing her face, ears and to their breasts, in a way that made him feel that he fainted or went crazy if he did not stop. Or maybe I was crazy, had to be crazy to afford to be lying there letting a stranger were enjoying so intimately.

- No, please! He whispered.

But he was between her thighs and she felt now that the body heat burned him and his entire skin was so sensitive she could feel to the fire of his breath. His own breathing was now only a gasp and began to moan softly, amazed by the new sensations he felt spring up in it, leaving no will to continue fighting.

Never anything like this had happened with Jared! To think such a thing should make you feel guilty, he said, as he lay there with the man who killed her husband ... But it was beyond blame, beyond good and evil ...

Jared and her. The two so young. The two hardly knew what they wanted ... He recalled the first night ... Jared was so drunk he almost fell asleep on the bed and began to snore while she, at her side, scared stiff and lay wrapped in her nightgown full of nails. And the next morning, when Jared realized that she was there, that excruciating pain ... He had bitten his lips to keep from crying. And then it was shame, shame and the bitter humiliation of the bloodstains on the sheets that had to scrub and scrub to disappear. Then Jared ride over it once or twice a week, lifting her nightgown and muttering unintelligible words, and possessed with haste and clumsiness. Elizabeth remembered the sound of his breathing heavy and panting as she should remain there, subject, until he was over at last and turn around to begin to snore almost immediately. Then she slipped out of bed to wash and lay down again as far from him as possible. That was the ugly appearance of which he spoke not of marriage. The timid advances of his mother

on "the duties of a wife," "the necessity of submitting to certain things that men want" had not prepared for the disappointment and disgust he felt every time it happened. The act without words that always reminded animals in the barn.

But now, now he, this stranger who was in his bed that he had not spoken a word yet, "I was showing how different could be the same event, making love in a thousand ways wonderful, hands, lips, with his strong manly body, awakening feelings are impossible to describe, even to herself. A wild and vibrant flourish of his belly that stretched and spread throughout the body and made her bow and shake until completely attached to him, his head thrown back.

- You are so beautiful, Beth! ...

And she moved to accommodate the body panting to his. No more embarrassment, no more resistance, only the desire, the need to feel even more in it ... beyond itself, beyond thought ... Only her feelings to start to scream wildly, moving the body as if all you wanted was to follow the beat of his teammate. There was a rise and a fall, a squeeze in and out inside her, flooding to relax as the warm sun after a storm or rain after drought. It seemed that he felt all that was happening in the depths of his being ... All that had been hidden and content over time, calling for free. He knew when to be gentle and when to be tough, almost brutal. Time had ceased to exist. There were only movement and sensation.

At any hour of that long night, the fire was extinguished. She did not care, curled in his arms, very tight, her face buried in his shoulder. Not budge. My head was wrapped in a nebula and was unable to fix the thoughts. She, Elizabeth Cady, just fornicating with a man she barely knew, was neither sorry nor ashamed. No. At last he felt at peace with itself. At last I was free!

Chapter 30

The valley and the plains, parched by the scorching sun beyond endurance, and a disturbing peace, kept people on edge, waiting.

The renegade Apaches, some bands were again at war and, from the North, the Comanches made their raids more often than usual. Not only were preparing to defend against these different enemies, but always present, small ranchers and landowners but also Prendergast, thus giving a break between them but all were preparing for war.

Among other things, Elizabeth Cady had learned not to ask too many questions. He was happy and delighted by knowing and feeling happy. He felt that until then had only existed, without knowing what it was like to live and enjoy the pleasures of every day, no matter what happened.

Whatever happened ... Sometimes choking anguish of foreboding as if he knew that was a sinner and that he would ever be punished not only for sin but for sin glorify and enjoy the happiness they gave you. Most of the time dismissed such thoughts and tried to keep busy when he was not around.

There was much to do. He had always been so, but now things were done. Sunday was busy as if I were twenty years younger, aware of their responsibilities. The fence of the yard looked better than when he was just completed and, after she had won. The car had been repaired and painted, like everything else. The basement- that she had hardly ever used- it was clean and were stored weapons and ammunition. Elizabeth preferred not to think about them or the times when Smith walked away many days. She was sure that he sometimes crossed the border. And other times ... preferred not to know. Led by Milt Kehoe, some members of the Association scolding. But others, like Dean Martin and Frank Burneson- older and more experienced, seemed to have accommodated themselves to what was happening. All had now had studied his maps and areas around them, finding out what were the weakest and which are best lend themselves to a defense, in the event of reaching those ends. And all had turned their houses into small fortresses, ensuring the provision of water and food to withstand a while.

"I think what we needed was someone to organize us," said Martin Burneson with a sigh.

She had come to go and visit them often and, when he was not Smith, was talking to Elizabeth. She knew he liked and always liked it. He was a widower and had a son and over 16 years and another who had turned 10. Everybody said it was a good husband and that he should remarry but he seemed willing to continue as it was. Martin liked Elizabeth because it was a good man who did not get to judge anyone and now that women, honest-wives had left to visit little by little, he liked his company especially when alone.

Elizabeth had decided to live each day. It was incredible how he had changed, even to herself. Sometimes I felt that my head was boiling so much work to absorb new customs and new ideas.

Things such as reading, she had been taught to believe they were harmful or sinful, were not at all. Neither was wearing underwear made of silk or stay naked allowing a man to see her and kiss her everywhere ...

- John Smith! ...

Elizabeth's hair tickled his face when, rubbing against him, was inclined to see it. Sometimes it was so hated riser and demanded a show of power that he was not able to offer at that time. Then he growled turning around to hide the pillow face unshaven, hoping to let him continue sleeping.

It was useless. She tormented him again and again passing his fingers through his back.

-Smith, this reminds me of the story my mother told me of the English captain who married the Indian princess.

Trying to quell the laughter, pressed against him, getting that "very reluctantly" took courage.

- Devil Beth!

Once he had said in anger that he did not remember who it was, something which once had been true. It was the same story he had told the sheriff, not caring if the fat man had believed or not. But

he felt a little ashamed of having used the same subterfuge to Elizabeth, especially now that she asked innocently

- Did you ever worry? ... I mean ... know who you are ...

He kept his face turned stubbornly still half asleep, but answered: "Naturally. Does it not concern the whole world?

- Yes! That's what I mean!

Beth jumped up, forcing him to turn around and look at her with lazy eyes.

"You ... I just meant if you worried about your real name, but you understood something else, .Suspiró. So many times I do not understand what you say ... or do not understand the true meaning of what they appear the words ... I wish ... Smith, who are you for real?

Ignoring the question, asked in turn:

"Well, what do you say to yourself, Pocahontas? What kind of woman you are, beneath the surface cold and prudish? Did not you happen to ask? For example, what are you doing here in bed with a bastard like me?

- Oh, no! He bowed his head beaten and rubbed it on his shoulder. I was just trying to say ... "He lowered his voice and snuggled tight to him that you're different. Mom taught school before marriage, so I think I had more preparation than most girls my age. But even so, half do not know you. For starters, I can not speak as well as you. Know the meaning of many words you use.

- For the love of God! What is this? A day dedicated to looking into the souls? What are you trying to tell me, Beth?

-Smith ... Do not be angry with me! It's just that sometimes I need to talk, you know? One thing that is a little more than bed together. You taught me that. And there's more ... I ... I love you, Smith. Or at least, I think I love you.

Beth ...

"No, please, do not want to stop now. I have to tell you all. Better for both.

He said nothing. He simply squeezing more into his arms. She

continued:

Jared ... yes ... I also talk to him. I ... well ... was the first guy who courted me and I wanted to stay an old maid. My family was not rich, you know? And there were a lot of mouths to feed. And Jared, in those days was a boy full of dreams. He dreamed of going west, take ownership and build us a nice place to live for ourselves. And this was what I wanted. Having dreams ... travel ... and end up with someone. Having an open space around. Y. .. I did not care too aware that he sometimes drank too much, but I took great pains to avoid my father to know ... I do not even care if ... that ... when we did ... well you know ... I did not care that was not too pleasant. I thought this should be so. Mom had told me that men liked to do things intimate with their wives and that wives should accept and fulfill his duty. And I turned, it turned even though I hated to y. .. though, do not laugh ... I felt vexed.

"So matters continued until we came here y. .. Well, Jared made new friends and began drinking too much. It was the people all the time and left me alone to take care of everything ... And I did not complain because, at least, did not sleep with me so often.

Sometimes, sometimes I provoked a discussion about him out of their boxes and get them to go to the town. Sometimes he beat me ... my fault because I caused him to do so. I felt guilty, guilty until sick because ... because I felt that God was angry with me for not being a good wife and because ... Could not be better than it was!

And now ... you ...

Beth ... dear, that's enough, eh! Come here.

He rushed at her, kissing her face covered with tears, trying to silence her with kisses.

- Smith, O Smith! ...

She put her arms, squeezing her warm body and obedient to him.

"This is not a sin ... Tell me it is not!

- Shut up, Beth!

- I love you! She whispered, pressing her lips against him. I know that you are not the same ... need not be. I even know that someday

you will go ... but no matter. You hear me? No matter, even if all you have is the here and now.

He halted the pained and incoherent speech with a kiss, knowing it was the only way to succeed and wishing, as usual, not to speak well so often. I knew it was tender, sweet and quite capable of giving and would not make her suffer.

Entered his body almost angrily but she met him with a passionate frenzy, for once without protest because it was day or because the bed clothes had fallen to the floor ... Even then, leaning back as he stood looking at her naked body trembling, passing large hands and experts from top to bottom.

"You're adorable, Beth.

But he never told her he loved her.

Shortly after this scene, he turned to walk away in one of those mysterious wanderings about which neither she nor any of the others, dared to ask him anything. Beth always seemed to know where he had left, claiming he had promised not to tell. That made her feel better, leaving to others the impression that their relationship was very close. Was done to himself the same questions as the rest because he had never offered to explain where he was going or when he would be back and she was too proud to ask.

But think much about it, stranger with a very deep pain, something like a void that needed filling. And he wondered if he could not bear to return someday. For in the depths of his soul, knew that was what would happen when least expected. It was that kind of man. End the task entrusted to him there, or would-be bored right direction and one day she would wake to find that she was gone. Burneson Martin, who visited frequently, was his only real friend, the only person she could trust but she realized with a certain feeling of guilt that this was only because he loved her.

"Elizabeth had said in his usual slow and somewhat pedantic, you

have to be practical. Although he'd be what kind of future awaits her? You will always be afraid, always be wondering if this time he will not return.

Martin, no ... "and began to mourn, but he continued relentlessly. "Yes. You have to tell me to listen to. And I think you think so too ... very often, judging by the deep dark circles that I see around his eyes. He spends his life thinking about him and worrying about him, right? You say which maintains that does not know who or where he comes, but I do not think so. Anyway, for me, that's not important. Have you thought that you may be married? What, somewhere, may also be a woman waiting to return?

- No, no! Not those ... Not a man of tying ties ...

- Are not you trying to establish ties? And if not that kind of man, what kind of man is? Are you going to give you what you want? I'm worried about you, Elizabeth. For me ... I do not like that man but I do not dislike. He is a man with some class. I know others like him. They laid plans, sometimes the seats ... but they are long. Instead you, yes, you, what will become of you when he leaves? He says he is living in the moment, the day ... But when it comes to his departure, what will you do? Is satisfied with staying here or try to go after him to stick with it, no matter what kind of life you can offer ... if it gives you something?

He had not offered anything. For the time was his man. He shared the bed with her, treated her kindly and even tenderness. He spoke to her about anything, never him. And he wanted and, to make it their own, had given him something precious. The discovery had made herself and become aware of her femininity. He had taught her how wonderful it was to love too ... and at the same time, how vulnerable I had made that discovery, loving him as she loved him. Beth was repeated again and again that what she had already given enough. I had no doubt that he could be cruel and so heartless, as Martin constantly warned him-but all that mattered is that she was very sweet.

I tried to explain it to Martin, stumbling over the words because I

needed him to understand but he only shook his head, lost in his forebodings.

"Elizabeth, one thing is what you say and what other thinks.

Where has gone this time? And for how long?

- Do not know! You are the only person to whom I dare say that much. But I know I will. He has given his word and also, as you know, has not taken a penny ...

"Yes, it's a very expensive man charged its services, however, seems to need money. I have or, at least, has all you need.

"Or what we need to we-.Saltó in his defense. Now we have weapons and ammunition ... Have you forgotten that? And we have a plan in case there are complications. We're doing something instead of talking to do ...

- "And who speaks it? Do not look well, Elizabeth. If I talk to make her think so ... and it must know what they think their friends. Prendergast know who knows ... Lefty He told the day she arrived. How do we know that ...?

"That is outrageous ... If that's what you think ... What bunch of hypocrites you all are! Why not say it to him in the face? It is not arming ourselves to indulge in Prendergast, this is not possible and you know it. We are better prepared than we have ever been.

- Elizabeth! That's not what I'm saying. What I am saying is that ... Ah, now I've made you angry and you've blown tears! I am angry with myself! Had not wanted to hurt her ...

He ran his hand over his eyes to wipe the tears for which he felt guilty.

"Then ... then, I say these things, Martin Burneson. Or it could not continue seeing him as a friend. Smith is a traitor and would not be able to hurt me. And please, can we drop the subject?

Martin again asked her to marry him and she shook her head full of anguish.

- Martin, I can not! Can not you understand? It would be impossible to feel what I feel for him. Please do not ask me again.

"I'll wait. I'm a patient man and you have come to interest me very

deeply. Later, perhaps ...

"But I ... How you might want to marry me when I ... we ...

Everyone knows we live here together ... I ...

"For me, only you care, my little Elizabeth. I'm not as young as you and I know human nature. But enough. For now let's talk about other things. Yes?

The days turned into weeks. Where was he? If something had happened ... if he dropped dead there ... Elizabeth tried not to worry but his face betrayed her and she could feel the stares of pity from Martin, to comfort the timid attempts of Sunday and even Fidelito. God! What if the day would come again no more?

Beth tried to convince himself that he cared so much only because it felt good. He had said it was possible that absent longer than usual. That, at least, had warned him. He could take care ... But she was always nervous and uncomfortable and, at night, not sleeping well. And there were moments that lie wanted to mourn for no apparent reason and that was something very strange in it. It was only when he began to feel nauseous in the mornings, during the second week of Smith's absence, when the truth broke through in his brain and suddenly, came the revelation.

"I am ... I have a baby! Oh, God, has happened to me! ... Then it was my fault all these years ... Jared was. And now I have a son ... yours ... "And behind the revelation, the hope arose spontaneously:" When I know, when I tell you, everything will be different. You'll want to settle down and stay with me, I know he will. "

Chapter 31

Beth. Warm, soft and sweet. Smell of freshly baked bread. His body, shelter and comfort and pleasure. Beth, wait, that is just there. The woman wants the man whose arms again.

He laughed cynically to himself. Shit ... He had been riding too long. Now think like Martin Burneson. Coming home and the same woman night after night would probably be very boring after

a while, as he must already know. And yet, what you were looking for? The answer came without trying, but try to avoid it. Passion and ardor. A woman with green eyes, sensual, able to laugh and punch, which had once been his and who had escaped. A woman who was a living flame, whose loss had left a scar that had marked him forever. Which is increasingly deepened him for being responsible for his death. How long was to keep running for that cause? The scar, like others she was wearing, had been with him constantly, would also have to learn to live with that.

Steven Morgan was angry with himself and stood suddenly impatient. There were things that had to do and, so far, had been devoted to war games. In a way also had been playing with time, because I needed time to heal. No of injuries to the body, his body seemed to survive against all contingencies, but the wounds of the soul. And later there was-and still-Beth.

The sky began to darken and threaten with a lightning crossing the clouds, when Steven was going around the horse, heading north. Once, on a day like this in the mountains of Mexico, had tormented the same thoughts. He knew he had spent most of his life running or hunting. Always back and forth, looking for distractions he needed along the road. Ginny had made him stop for a while. But Ginny was gone from his life forever extinguished his passion challenging. To hell with it! I was going to erase from his memory, no matter the cost!

He rode with caution because of the constant danger of a clash with a band of marauders, and continued his route. Prayers End-the place where he was going at first, had been left far behind.

Had I known that was the subject of a long and bitter argument between Renaldo Ortega and his wife Melissa, Steven would have smiled, knowing as he knew it was impossible to be angry with Missie long.

Renaldo was not so angry because the truth is he loved his young

wife but perdition! ... Missie sometimes not understand and his simplistic way of looking at things, he found it difficult to explain. Despite seven months pregnant, Missie remained incredibly slim. Thing that worried everyone, except the doctor had sent Don Francisco. Neither took advantage of her pregnancy, she thought Renaldo indignant at seeing him tilting back his chin defiantly the same as before.

I still do not understand ... And I will not stop asking questions until you do, so ... Renaldo, why did you think? Nor can I understand how your uncle is so stubborn and so picky, it has allowed. I thought she loved Manolo ... I mean, Stephen, of course ... What happens is that I can not get used a. ..

-Treasury, gently interrupted my treasure Renaldo, does not it make sense that it has bad blood for something that none of us can do anything? Ginny has gone to Europe with such Lord Tynedale and their children ... And I suppose, my love, you can not deny the right he had to take them. Esteban has not seen them and has not even been able to send a message asking how they are. My cousin can be very ... dispassionate.

- Not! Basically it is not ... you saw how good he was with me and even my father and the boys later. It had occupied the land that should have been my mother. Is not that right? Not exactly a villain and not fair ... I think someone should have warned him. I think Ginny should have told me a damn whether or not you were in love with her before he met me ...

Distracted, Renaldo took her in his arms.

"I've never been in love with is not nobody like you, my darling. And never will be ... Why not going to happen if you made me the happiest man in the world? But ...

"Then, write a letter to Steven and tell. Or leave it do to me. And I'll write a letter to Ginny and I am going to send a. .. Do you have the address of his uncles in France? These two poor creatures ... hustle like ... For the final re-let there while she pendonea around, heading towards Turkey, no less, with this Richard. I know I do

not know and have no right to judge ... and sister I liked, but that has nothing to do. And if you know what I think ... Well, what I think is that Ginny has been only for him to go behind it and prove that he loves. And I think Richard took advantage of her when she was ill and if Steven learns ...

At the mere idea that this could happen, but tried paled Renaldo take comfort that his uncle would manage to handle the situation with his autocratic style as always. I would understand Steven, and Steven, of course, understand. He was too proud to chase a woman who had shown so clearly not wanted. For Steven would always be other women ... In the quest to end the discussion, Renaldo said quickly:

"I think we should stick to the facts is not it, darling? But I promise to write to Stephen ... I get in that way that smile again? His partner, Sam Murdock, you must have idea where to walk.

Sam Murdock was just hoping that Steven would come to receive their message. But Sam was a patient man, had not taken a vacation for years and was willing to wait. If Steven had decided not to go, had told him.

Prendergast's ranch with the emblem of the double P on all sides, stretching from the mountains to the valley to where the house and watched Jack Prendergast, big as a bear, ruling his domain like a monarch. He had three sons from his first wife, a woman suffering that had been eating just as her husband was becoming stronger and more stubborn. A few years after the death of Amelia, Prendergast had met and married a gorgeous French that he was in his thirties, a distant cousin of the Marquis de Mora, who had decided to try his luck with a ranch in New Mexico. With Françoise, who was still attractive and as forceful as her husband had fathered a daughter named Lorna. Lorna was the only family member who did not govern Prendergast. The crown princess, ran to her father and brothers without doing anything to lift a finger,

with wide eyes and innocent face. All Lorna wanted and had not yet achieved, was a trip to Europe. His mother did not want to leave his father and her father wanted her at home. As he confided to his friend Sam Murdock, did not trust those decadent Europeans. What did he want his girl to go to Europe? Everything you could want in Europe, I had brought for her. As the grand piano that he had asked a few years earlier. And a dance teacher. And his dressmaker, a woman who had worked for Worth in Paris. Lorna had sent to study at a college in the East, and the time they had spent time apart, was more than enough, it was better to stay quiet for a while. On the other hand was not the time to travel, with the Indians at the gates of their domains and those miserable smallholders causing problems ...

Sam Murdock was a good listener and when he spoke it was with good sense. He was one of the few men whom the Great Jack called "friend" and almost the only one listening. That night I was rocking in the gallery while waiting for dinner was ready. There had been a cloudburst and the air smelled fresh and clean ... The scent of lemon and sage everywhere mingled with the pines.

"So what is your opinion? Prendergast suddenly asked, "Dawson spoke to the same Sheriff Blaine and according to him, the man who had stopped exactly matched the address you had given him his partner. He had been seriously injured and then they hang almost the same small landowners from whom I was talking about. I think it could have been one of my boys ... But suddenly disappears and is lost from view. It seems good news. I know what is happening and I have sent some of my boys to find out, as long as those damned Apaches do not preclude it.

"It's not like Steven left without further harm," said Sam Murdock very dry. But he added in more somber tone: "I must confess I am surprised that has not already appeared here. We may have to do some research.

Lorna appeared at that time in the gallery. Her hair was reddish harmony with golden eyes, when he smiled, he formed dimples.

He wore modern evening dress because since the arrival of Françoise, the ranch was used to dress for dinner.

- You still are you talking about Steven Morgan looks like a man so fascinating? I want you to come over here, would someone else with whom to practice my French. And perhaps he could tell me more of Europe ...

He stabbed his father round eyes full of reproach. He tried to be the most angry and failed to smile with conceit.

Lorna has a fixed idea.

Lorna is committed and determined to travel to Europe before being much older. You promised to think about it, Dad! Would not you like to go after graduation?

"What I would like ...-. Prendergast failed to finish his comment because there was a distant greeting.

"Looks like Clint who was late for dinner. Who is healthy?

- Oh! Clinton is always late and always has an excuse.

Lorna narrowed his eyes against the lamp and ran into the darkness, turning once with a tone of surprise and excitement in his voice.

- Dad! I think we're going to dinner with views. Clinton is accompanied by a stranger horseman.

He stood in the gallery, pretending not to hear her mother calling her from inside the house. The company was always exciting, at least initially. Then, usually turned out to be ordinary people, ordinary as his father and brothers, just as narrow horizons. But she always hoped that someday ... Why could not happen in real life the same things in books?

And then it happened ... Lorna gasped, forgetting all their sophistication and, as everyone else stared at the tall man who climbed the steps with his brother.

He was as tall as his father. It was the first thing I noticed. High but not half as wide as it was not on her shoulders. She had black hair, dark blue eyes and a face as dark as that of the Indians, except a scar on his cheek and another across his temple. Despite

the scars and the beard, Lorna thought it was the most handsome man she had ever seen. And the most attractive ... Before Sam Murdock I would have appreciated, had already guessed who it was. And, despite what he was wearing, she realized that this man was used to develop in the most sophisticated living rooms with the same naturalness with which she wore her tattered clothes rancher. He was glad to have put their best jewelry that night. He would have no choice but to notice ... And notice it to her! ...

At least for Lorna Prendergast, the night was very short. He had felt the eyes of Steven Morgan about it during dinner and had engaged him in conversation. But he also warned that those blue eyes, shaded by a ridiculously long eyelashes, was impenetrable. As she had been very polite but his attention was devoted to her father and brothers. The conversation between them had not the least bit interested. Is it that the men had no more talk of cattle, guns and the Indian problem? This man was different, it felt that way. And the idea that he was limited to dealing with formal politeness even though she was showing brilliant and seductive, stung the pride and intrigued at the same time.

After dinner we had gone with other men at the gallery, to smoke and drink cognac. Lorna, who was left alone with his mother looked at her.

- What are you doing here without his wife? If he has a wife ... I think I'd like to tame it, Mom.

Françoise shook his head, thinking that he preferred that his daughter was not so stubborn and willful.

-Tesoro mine, be careful ... I think it's an easy man. And do not forget he has a wife ... or had. Anyway just came to make a short visit to Sam and talk to your father and, from what I have heard, what they have in hand is not pleasant.

Lorna heard voices outside had increased tone and, recognizing his brother Joseph, frowned.

- Joseph always bragging! And Pete is always passing the buck. A Clint does not care about anything, entangled as it is with women that those who visit. None of them is worth half that dad nor are they as good-looking as he is. However this Steven Morgan, it is a handsome man. What are they discussing?

They discussed the rights of the intruders, smallholders and ranchers. Jack Prendergast and his sons supported to the hilt his views while Sam Murdock rocked in her chair and hid behind his quiet smile cigar in which was concentrated. Steven had finally arrived without too much explanation for his tardiness. But the truth was that now that was there was not losing much time! Sam Prendergast wondered if Jack would be willing to put on the glove, hearing that Steven told him that his ideas were outdated.

"If you'll allow me to tell you, sir, a war with the ranchers would serve only to spill blood and spend money without any profit for you. Would you be attacking or defending too busy to handle their affairs. And you're involved in this business, like everyone else, to make money, is not it? In the long run, would not provide any benefit to force some people miserable to leave land which legally belongs to them. I'm afraid that time has passed. You should have been fixed in these areas before, when an acre of the land did not cost more than a few cents. It belongs to others. And they have teamed up and organized to defend what rightfully belongs to them legally own and ready to fight if necessary. Would not you do the same in their place?

- No es lo mismo! Prendergast cried. He leaned forward in his chair with his face red with anger. We were here before. They were my father and his friends who came first, which drove the Indians, who fought in that bloody war, those who fought to keep it free. And then came the bloody savers here bringing the papers saying that this or that was his. And they raised the fences, forcing us to do the same. Things have gone so far that we have no where to graze cattle ... And that means they have to leave these lands o. ... drive them out ...

"They have experience of other wars between ranchers and are determined not to be evicted. They formed an association and are willing to fight for what they believe is theirs.

- They're a bunch of whiners and cowards! A party of farmers stinking of horse thieves, and, with a few head of cattle, which aim at developing their own herds. They have no idea what he is fighting!

Steven Morgan said quietly:

"They're learning me.

After comfortable slouched in his chair and waited for the explosion occurred, surely, was to occur. And it happened. Lorna waited impatiently and sulking. It seemed that centuries passed and the men were still inside. Continue to be heard the loud voices and angry. He wanted to go under the pretext of serving coffee but, for once, the mother became respected and forbade it. Finally went to bed, still grumbling, determined to revenge the next day. He liked to stay in bed late and let one of their Mexican maids bring her coffee au lait in the bedroom but that day was to dispense with such a habit. She would get up to breakfast with the rest, or even before ...

To make it fresh, the house was built in U around the courtyard. It had been designed by a Spanish who was killed by the Comanches in one such raid, before it was finished. For the safety of the family, the Great Jack Prendergast had no more to build some buildings around and near. The house was very comfortable and, for now, for Lorna was 'home' but, since he had been studying in the East and seen the houses of her companions, was unhappy to find herself in the solitude of this remote place.

The most ambitious was to travel to Europe. His mother still had relatives there, why should not he do so?

Lorna had strange dreams that night that woke her up all the time, and until six in the morning she could not make the effort to get out of bed. He devoted much time to get ready and be ready soon. He was astonished at the huge mirror that her father had brought

for her. His new black suit rider made it seem older than 18 who had actually met. He had a gold satin trim and a matching scarf tied around his neck is fastened with a brooch of diamonds and topaz. She was an excellent horsewoman. Steven Morgan would notice if echoed his advances, he invited her for a walk.

While appearing on the patio where breakfast is usually served at long tables well supplied, earned the displeasure of seeing that everyone was already up.

His brother Pete grazed his ear, whispering:

- Who do you think hunting today, sister?

She felt like kicking him with their high-heeled boots.

- What are you doing up so early, doll? Asked his father with little tact.

And his brother Joe gave him a whistle of admiration. But Lorna was determined not to let it spoil the day.

- Good morning everyone! He said softly holding her skirt with a gloved hand while he motioned to one of the servants to bring him a cup of coffee.

Sam Murdock was already there but not him. Lorna hid his disappointment as he could and approached the old man after kissing her father.

- I could not sleep this morning! It was a beautiful day! And Gipsy need to exercise ... So I decided to take a morning stroll. Will you go with, Mr. Murdock?

By the way flashing eyes, she realized that Sam knew very well who wanted to ride. But he was gracious enough not to show it.

"Look, Lorna, if I had a few years younger, had used the occasion excited. But I think I'll start preparing the bags, now that my partner has decided to appear.

- Are not you going to go? Oh, I'll really miss! He hoped to convince dad to let me travel with you if it were only to San Francisco. The guys I have there are tired of asking me to visit them and also have there a couple of friends of those who went with me to school ... Oh, Mr. Murdock, you talk to Dad!

Sam had fun watching all the time Lorna looked above him, looking ... He had a very particular way of looking and he had noticed how Steven looked across the table during dinner the night before. Would not hurt that the two parties already.

Just then Steven Morgan came riding clothes and cartridges at the waist. He wore black trousers and a faded blue shirt fastened with a leather belt. A dark blue scarf around his neck. He had already said what I had come to say and was anxious to leave and get to do things. Sam and he had had a long conversation after the others had gone to bed stampede and was now impatient to finish their business and had left things half done. Needed work to put his head back in order. And then there was Beth. Diablo! Something would have to do with Beth.

What Steven did not know was that Françoise Prendergast who knew his daughter had been talking with Sam and, seemingly inconsequential questions, he had learned several things about your partner ... Among others who had recently been widowed. And after he had been talking with her husband who was still pondering what he had spoken the previous night. Now Jack Prendergast was meditating, trying to make a decision. Keeping what he thought to himself. He watched his daughter's face and watched the Steven Morgan.

Lorna helped him make a decision. I could not resist their requests for long.

- Dad, please! Please let me go for a ride! I will go alone and I promise ...

"You know it's dangerous to go around, child. Are dangerous not only Indians but the shepherds and villagers ...

She glanced belligerent Morgan returned it to the stoicism of the Indians. "Shit," thought Jack, Lorna is able to take care of herself and of making any man who put a bullet in her malleable putty, in the twinkling of a rooster ... Why Steven Morgan would be the exception? "

"But Dad ...

"Let me tell you something. I promised Mr. Morgan teach the old excavations of the north side of the ranch, you know what they are. You could go there with him. I still think there is money there and I do not care who walks strangers sticking their noses in those parts. Here, Sam says that the rocks look good. I would like a further opinion.

Lorna Prendergast, with his red hair and golden eyes was all woman and looked at him face to face challenging. Indifferent and chastened by the experience, Steven is easily kept quiet. No more anxious and eager virgins. Was that she was more than evident by their audacity. In Lorna kept seeing Ginny. A Ginny as it was when they fell one another's arms for the first time. Only, instead of making progress, Ginny started hating ... and ended up hating it. What he had to lay down his mind, was that she had gone with Andre Delery their own volition. Who had died in an accident was inevitable destination and, if not dead, it would be capable of killing with his own hands.

- Does it return you directly to Prayers End or go first to San Francisco? You have a house there, right?

He had houses everywhere and not live in any of them, or anyone could call home. Lorna's question brought him back to reality and looked at her as he looked at all women who were offered. She got something red but held his gaze.

"I first Prayers End. I have left unfinished business there. Then you may go to San Francisco or Mexico.

"You must travel a lot. I would be able to do me too. More than anything, what I want is to go to Europe. Lorna sighed. Dad is so stubborn. But what I'm working. I know I'll have to settle down sooner or later. But ... So many things I want to do before! For a change, had stopped playing and was really flirting translucent leaving what he wanted. Steven looked at him thoughtfully.

-Go from one place to another can be tiring and boring after a while but I think you'd enjoy a trip to Europe. Produce quite a stir

there. I'm sure ...

- Do you think I'm pretty?

"You're a beauty and she knows very well.

"Then why has not tried to kiss me?

This time he laughed. The laughter made him look younger and less dangerous.

"I was thinking about that. But I hoped that I asked.

- Oh ...

He almost forgot that I was a lady and an oath then stopped, and instead smiled like a cat's eyes and provocatively.

"I'm asking. I think I want to kiss me. And not many men have kissed me, really ...

Steven brought his horse to her and kissed her without saying a word. But no one kissed it as he kissed her until then, leaving her limp, breathless, wanting ... wishing not know what. And when he finished, he said sharply:

- Enough! It is good that you begin to understand that if you remains with the kisses of men in this way may give more than what you are asking, Miss Prendergast.

For once, Lorna was silent, trying to recover.

I wanted him to kiss her again but she was afraid, not just by him but for herself. It was possible that this was what he meant when he warned mum on the emotions that are out of hand. He wanted her not to let the kiss, but what would have happened if he had done? The girls used to look for trouble ... Of course, not just for kissing. She was not as ignorant as her classmates. But women always had to pay a price while men went off as fresh. Restarting the ride as if nothing had happened, looked askance Lorna Steven Morgan, wondering how many women have kissed in your life and if at that time was a woman who did more than kiss her.

Chapter 32

The night was suddenly there in the plains, down from the mountains under the peaks which appeared black against the red-

orange light of dusk. It was time to light the lamps and stoke the fire of households. It was time to try not to think, not to look into the bedroom, longing for the man who used to wait there at that time. But he was not man who likes waiting ... The wait was for her ... The waiting and suffering.

Beth moved slowly through the kitchen, trying to dwell on each task as much as possible. Martin had gone to visit her that day and had returned to ask if she would marry him. This time, overwhelmed by grief and worry, he had finally to confess openly the brutal truth.

-Martin ... you do not understand ... I ... I have good reason to believe that ... I'm pregnant.

Almost expected him back again disgusted. Muda, waited her reaction, hoping for a change of attitude and, instead, he stretched out his hands and took hers, held it tightly.

- Oh, Elizabeth! You know I've been married ... I had begun to suspect ... Women gain another angle when ... So ... What are you doing? Does he know?

-No. I have not yet said. I did not know ... I was not sure until after he left ... When you return ...

-If you re ... Three weeks ago. It's a long time, Elizabeth.

- Will return!

"No matter. Even so, do you think you will marry? Is this place big enough for a man like him?

He made a sweeping gesture with his hand and Beth realized what he meant. In many ways, Martin was a wise man. He continued before she could answer:

"I do not care. Even knowing what you just said, I still want to be my wife. Try to make her happy and raise the child as my own-
.Sonrió excited. I wish that was a girl like you. I want a girl to pamper her and carved dolls. Do you know I'm very good at making dolls? I had a niece who died of typhoid fever at age five. He always asked Uncle Martin's dolls, I always was asking him a more ... And my sister made them dresses ... Are you crying ...

What I said?

"I'm crying because ... because you're a good man, Martin Burneson. And because I appreciate ... grateful that you are willing to give me his name after knowing what he knows about me. But Martin, I ...

"I know .se up and looked at her face covered with sadness. He does not want to tell you about this until he returns and you are not safe, right? Well, there must be time to make a determination. If I say yes, it must be because you've thought it over and that's what you want to do. So ... back tomorrow ...

Again and again she thought that Martin meant security. Martin back the next day because he had promised. While Smith ... God, did not even know his real name or where he came from or where it had gone when he left. All I knew about him was what made her feel when they were together in bed. Was it enough as a basis for manufacture hopes to build a life? What name would your child? What kind of life awaits the poor creature? Not wanted for her son ostracized that she was so hard to bear. It was also his child.

- Beth?

He had entered from behind, so slowly that she had not even heard the door opening and closing. He jumped so hard that he fell on the stove and he had to hold her, shaking his sleeves sparks while throwing an oath.

- Oh, Smith! "He said. Fucking Smith! Where have you been? I was worried sick ...

- Yes here you are well defended against an attack by the Indians! I entered behind the corral, I unsaddled the horse and all without any of your brave grooms even flinching ...

Domingo was to bathe Fidelito. You know the task that is! ... It is likely that it was making such a scandal that neither ... Where have you been? Three weeks without a word ...

While protesting his eyes never tired of looking at it. He was sunburned, had a good appearance and wore a dark blue shirt open new chest, of a fabric so fine that it seemed lawn, covered with a

black vest that did not recognize. He had never seen used before and vest that looked as if the garment apart.

Beth let the words you were springing jostling each other, wishing that he did not look so insistently. His face was blackened, her hair anyway and had not bothered to change her dress all day. What he saw when he looked? Why had not kissed her yet?

- "Smith? ...

It was then when he finally threw his arms, holding his chest in an embrace so tight that both bodies seemed to melt into one.

Beth ... I've missed. Jesus, how I have desired!

I still blush when I made him say those things aloud. He laughed at his blushes and picked her up in the middle of his feeble protests, to take her to the bedroom.

"No, not now ... Let me on the floor! The stew will burn. Alas, Smith ... you're breaking the dress! Leave me alone! ...

There was something barely contained in her voice that she had not heard before.

- To hell with the stew and to hell with the dress! I brought a new one that I want you for me ... later. Now I want to without, honey ... Without clothes and without reservation.

When he started to kiss all the arguments that had tried to stammer out, seemed to dissolve. And to the shame and guilt complex that always attacked when she was alone. There was something I wanted to say, but even that seemed to matter at that point ... Not when he was doing what he was doing with her body and she wanted to do, making her moan of pleasure and desire.

Later, when I lay abandoned and satisfied by his side, began again with his questions, beset by the need to know.

- Where did you go this time? What did you do? I was afraid ...

It had turned burying its head in his arms but she felt him turn to his side. His voice was quiet and without inflection.

"First crossing into Mexico. I had some business there. And then I headed north to visit Prendergast.

- A visit to? "He sat up and pushed by a spring. Who? He repeated,

feeling stupid for doing it and wishing I could see his face in shadow.

"Lie, Beth. I have many things to tell about it. Stop looking at me that way.

"I want to know why ...

"I was not there to betray them, if that's what you're thinking. I thought it was possible to speak with Prendergast and stop this war that is brewing. Anyway, my partner was there with them and Sam was the reason I came here the first time.

- Does your partner? ... "Partner in what, Smith? What was it in house Double P?

"Relax, Beth," he sighed, "I'm trying to explain it. And, for starters, my name is not Smith, is Morgan. You can start calling me Steven if, when finished, you are too angry to not address me. Beth could not of course know, that man was not too inclined to give explanations. She lay beside him, stiff as a stick and burning with rage. I had lied. From the beginning he had lied! He was glad that the room was dark so he could not see the tears running down his face. I really did not want to tell him what I thought but, if he tried to tell her tears she had been betrayed. For that reason alone was silent until he finally could not resist.

- How could you? ... Why let us talk? ... Why take the job? "Out of spite or because I enjoyed playing with us? You ...

"I took the job because I wanted you, damn Beth ... And because ... say that because it was a challenge and I needed to do something. But more than anything for you. For Christ! What they want, a bloody war? I spoke with Prendergast and I said which way I would if it were to be problems. And he has agreed to sit down and discuss with your spokespeople. The fact is that tomorrow night will be in Denver House and if you come down a little donkey, you yourself could go to see him, his wife and daughter.

The practical sense of what he was saying did not fail to penetrate the mind of Beth but she was hurt, angry and hurt.

- What kind of man are you? "He finally said, lowering his voice.

- By now you should have an opinion formed about that!

"That's not what I mean. Are you a gangster? Is that why you give explanations even Prendergast? What are you, Mr. Steven Morgan? How do you manage to live well ... besides laugh at the expense of people like us? Where does the money for arms and ammunition y. ..?

"I have not stolen any bank if that's what you think. At least in recent times.

The next day was to remember that phrase when Sheriff Blaine passed the house. Beth and then cared nothing for nothing. The previous night had been like a nightmare, except when they made love. After ... Beth thought it had partly to blame for the anger and pounding had asked, made a witch, until he tired, he had gotten out of bed and dressed himself. Had hurt doing that and she, as driven by the devil, had shouted, his voice blurred by tears:

- Where are you going? I had promised an explanation and you ...

- I'm going to town and you can find in Denver House when you're ready to listen instead of screaming like a washerwoman!

On reaching the door he turned to sinister voice saying:

-Or maybe you prefer to send Milt Kehoe behind me.

There was still too proud to follow him and spent the rest of the night desperate nublársele crying until the hearing and unable to breathe as it was not for the mouth. Why had not heard ...? What should he do now?

Martin Burneson came early in the morning and his visit did little to alleviate it a bit. She told him that Steven Morgan (he could stop calling Smith), had stopped by her house last night and had sat down to talk for a long time. With great tact, Martin made no comment by the state in which she was and did not stay too long.

"I promised to talk to the other, Elizabeth. In what he says is right. Why embark on a war between ranchers where there will be no winners but there may be many victims? He suggests that some of us let us hand grazing lands in exchange for water Prendergast ... You're right ... You're right if all of us are willing to sit at a table

and discuss our grievances rather than resorting to violence.

- You talk like him! "She snapped. He is a violent man, do not you know everyone? And now he dares to talk about peace ...

Then he remembered and why Jared had died and that she had slept every night with the man who killed him. The first face turned red and then pale.

Martin was not to be confused by its vehemence. He had not had time to sit and drink coffee when I was going to put on his old hat on his head.

"I hate seeing her like this, Elizabeth, you know. But you must think everything very well. I'll stop by around the corner ... if you let me.

She could not ask questions that only Steven Martin Morgan could answer. The stranger with blue eyes and rugged features who had shared the bed with her, told her he wanted her and had lied. How many lies would you say? Or should I say let the truth before releasing her accusations? If she had said once that he loved her ... When the sheriff arrived that afternoon, Elizabeth was washed red eyes and still maintained the battle with herself. Would you go to the people behind him like he did before, or wait to see if she returned to her? Would he come him?

At the sound of horse's hooves could not avoid running into the gallery with a red face in a mixture of fear and excitement. What to say ... How to act ... But it was only the sheriff Blaine that he just got out of the horse pulling the reins to Fidelito who was so embarrassed and disappointed as she was.

"Good evening, Mrs. Cady. "Alone at home?

The question was superfluous. She realized that she knew despite the stares absently threw around.

I could not leave it out there. The polite forms were sometimes necessary.

- Good to see you, Sheriff! Do not want a coffee and a slice of cake I made yesterday?

He stroked his mustache as was his custom and thanking her,

followed her inside the house, where he sat comfortably in the kitchen.

"Much excitement in the town ... I suppose I have told him-.La expression of his face tight protruding bones nothing showed. While she was busy at the stove, he continued, with a sigh: For a long time that Prendergast did not come for the people ... I could swear the old man with his wife and daughter ... Only that she is no longer so young ... The prettiest girl you ever saw, dressed it is a beauty. The ladies say that his father makes him bring clothes and Paris of the East as well. Must be around eighteen and still not married. It seems pretty crazy with that hair y. ..

- Yes? Elizabeth said although seeming disinterest in again began to suffer.

"Yes," continued the sheriff dedicated to twist the ends of his mustache and leaning back in his chair, but that is not what brings me here, Lizzie.

I looked at him and growled crossed knowing full well how bothered to call her by the nickname. And, with a look of solemnity, said pompously:

"I have some information that I think would like to hear. Really interesting information. As you know, Milt Kehoe has been chasing me for that data to find out who calls himself Smith.

"No, I did ... Elizabeth she began but he cut himself with a hand gesture.

- Oh ... I know what the intentions of Milt. But I am also a curious man in all this was something that convinced me. Shows a man jumping off the train with two late-model weapons, and I know how much it costs to get, and proves that he knows to use them efficiently and quickly. Is obvious that someone had to hear of a man, are you still my reasoning?

Elizabeth poured another cup of coffee and leaned back to fill the sheriff, trying to keep your hands busy. Then he said coldly:

"I know that Smith is not his real name and know what the real.

He rushed to answer:

"His name is Steven Morgan and, once it was known as Sam Whittaker, but that was a long time ... It is assumed that Sam Whittaker was hanged by vigilantes in Dallas last year, but the stories roll soon. Returning Steven Morgan ... came by accident. Is not that a damn coincidence, after all the research I have done?

"Sheriff, I do not see ...

"Give me a minute, Lizzie and you'll see. Look, a U.S. marshal was visiting my office, checking the signs of people looking and stuff, and we were coming down the street when we saw the Prendergast. Were accompanied by an older man, a man named Murdock, a billionaire. A man who acted alone, they say. And her friend Smith was riding beside him. Marshal Seymour recognized him at once. I had heard of him in Texas and even had seen him on a hunt. It was among the "wanted" but ...

Elizabeth knew that Blaine was purposely looking to break effect, and knew also that, at all costs, keep your face should stop their thoughts transparent. But it was impossible. He kept his hands gripping the folds of her apron and stared at him until finally he was forced to clear his throat and look away.

"According to legend, stole a shipment of gold from a U.S. senator, Sen. Brandon. And they took him to Mexico. And not just gold, also the daughter of the senator. He took as his mistress, they say, and the father sent in pursuit marshals, agents and hunters on both sides of the border by providing an inordinate amount of money on his head. Things continued like that until some years later became husband and wife and married the daughter of a senator, he lifted all charges. And of all the saints in heaven!, What are you doing here now?

Chapter 33

The House Denver boasted of being able to compete as equals with the best hotels all over the territory to the north of Santa Fe inclusive. That night was careful management emphasis on providing the best service. He had climbed the wines from the

wineries. Sox cattle, smoked salmon, fresh fish the river and farming chickens were sold at exorbitant prices ... had been prepared with exquisite dedication to guests. The chandeliers had been taken down and re-polished before being put in place. The floors and tables had been thoroughly rubbed until they were brilliant. It was a rumor that he might even have been dancing ... Dance gala to women crazy.

The men had been talking all afternoon and much of the night before. That is what Martin told Elizabeth. It was to be a night of true celebration. But she was not in the mood festive. He had spent the night crying, after sending a brief note with Sunday in response to which Martin had brought him.

It was not necessary that Mr. Morgan would bother to make such a long journey to find it. If she did, she would refuse to go. He had of course planned to meet with everyone at dinner the next night. Why not?

Beth:

Sorry I lost control. I hope you're wearing the dress I got you again when you go after you. I think you will be well. I think there are still many things we have to talk and there is something I'd like to ask.

It would not ask her to marry her because she was married. He had no doubt the habit of keeping mistresses through which he passed when he had time to devote to the women! He had desired only because there was nothing on hand and had left her and see that I hated it. Ah, but should have kept that!

Elizabeth arrived at the hotel accompanied by Martin Burneson with head high. He knew that every other woman, "her friends" would not take his eyes off her and mutter louder if possible, still to see how she acted and how he acted before his fine friends.

Okay, they did!

For all that was prepared. For the unprepared, it was to see how

pretty she was Lorna Prendergast, with its elegant evening dress, covered with diamonds chest and ears and supporting a possessive hand on his arm Steven Morgan. Neither was prepared for the expression that immediately covered Steven's eyes, in the disappointment quickly turned to the blackest of the furies, not bothering to hide it.

He should have been flattered to see that he left to Lorna in the act, saying just one word of apology, and striding across the room with such a look of anger in her eyes that she wanted to go back.

Elizabeth said breathlessly:

- Martin! ...

Martin Burneson forced to let go and gently loosen the fingers that suddenly had clung to him and said firmly:

"I think, dear, that this is an issue that has to solve yourself.

Does he ever not worry what others might think? Without a word he had taken Elizabeth's waist, pressing with fingers that looked like steel, and crossed the room with her, ignoring the looks that came down upon from all corners, including from his friends. He took up a corner of the room, among a large table covered with cakes and a jar with a palm excessive.

- Why the hell not you wearing the dress that I brought?

Overwhelmed and desperate, he replied firmly:

"Because ... was not suitable for me. I left the neckline too open and here the women do not dress well. You know. Also you said you always liked this dress.

After much thought, had put on the black taffeta dress and had carefully stored the beautiful embroidered silk dress he had brought and which must have cost a fortune. The silk had been stained with their tears, but that he would never know.

- By God, Beth! You see how they dressed Lorna and her mother! Women very respectable, let them wear the dress more than arms and neck uncovered! What do you care what other people say?

I did not know how she was managing to keep his voice steady.

"I care because they are my friends and neighbors. Because I hope

to spend the rest of my life here with them.

"I see. Steven's voice had become dangerously cunning and his eyes narrowed in a way that left her pinned to his site. Are you trying to tell me something about it, Beth? I thought to ask you to come to San Francisco with me. Lorna and her mother are also there, and Jack is going to provide an escort of soldiers ... at least until we crossed the Apache territory. I would have liked to come if you are able to stop thinking about the talk of your neighbors. Can not Mrs. Prendergast serve as an excuse?

"Oh God, she prayed silently, do shut up, do not tempt me, give me strength!"

She herself was surprised at his composure.

"Excused or not, you're still a married man, Mr. Morgan. Or do you not care what you may think your wife? In what capacity are you going to make happen ... Maid of how Prendergast, perhaps? She heard a deep breath and shuddered seeing how he marked the wrinkles around the mouth.

"I should shake your shoulders and squeeze you until your stupid brain begin to function," he muttered with a laugh and mischievous. Do not be afraid to do anything that may conflict with your friends ... But while we're on the subject, I can tell you who gave you this information, forgot to add that my wife is dead. He died a few months ago and I've had time to get used to think I am a widower.

Something in the way you say, the cool intensity of his voice, the impenetrable hardness of his eyes, made him want to run out and Beth hiding, without hearing anything else. But it was as if the two had been trapped by the words that were said and Beth broke without having time to think about:

- Sorry! He should not have said ...

- For the love of God! Never regret what you've said ... And you answered me yet, now that we've done to give us excuses ... Well?

...

- Do you have children?

He did not know why he asked the question. Except that suddenly was important for her to know. He looked taken aback, and then mad:

- What the hell does that have to do with us? Yes, I have kids.

Twins to be precise. A girl and a boy. I've never seen.

- Have not you? ...

Beth, I'm not meant to be a parent. I like to walk from one place to another. Vagabond soul I suppose.

Now it was her.

He said softly:

"I see. He deliberately held her breath and she continued firmly, "I should not ask so much ... He had no right to do so. But it was just that talk and, for once, we were honest with each other.

He was watching his face anxiously, wanting to dare to reach out and caress the scars, trying to memorize his features as he did when the two were happy and he was just "Smith". But that was over and now finally told what had come to say:

"Thanks for inviting me but I can not accept. I am committed to marry Martin Burneson.

Silence. He watched her mouth twitched and thought he'd leave without saying a word. But he stayed there, studying her thoughtfully, his face again covered by a mask.

-Beth, are you sure that what you do is what you really want?

Now she was easier to talk. He escaped the lump in her throat and said defensively:

- I'm sure. Martin is a good man is a noble man. A man who takes root. That's what I need. I would not fit in San Francisco and in most places where you'd have to go. I am settled and I like this place. I think ... I'm sure with time I get to love Martin as he loves me. I respect him and trust him.

They looked at one another and, finally, he ran his hand over his face very gently.

"You're a beautiful woman, Elizabeth.

He said gently, then took her hand and led her back to where he

was Martin Burneson.

I miss Beth. But cynically, Steven Morgan confessed that it would only be for a while.

She was right. It was offering nothing while Martin Burneson not only offered him the life I wanted but also marriage.

Did most of the trip to California to act as a guide and in a bad mood. In his spare time talking to Sam Murdock or with the silent man who called himself Burrows and had joined them in Arizona. Steven Burrows had known long ago, when the two rode shotgun in hand by the theater of war. He also had some contact with Sam Murdock. It was a good company.

Françoise Prendergast stand the journey fairly well, but her daughter was really sick. And cut into his self because Mr Morgan avoided her and was paying very little attention. She was accustomed to speak frankly with her mother-wise woman, worldly and understanding-and one day he said:

- I love you, Mom! And I'm going to get!

Françoise, who knew his daughter more than good, merely lifted his eyebrows:

- Yes? What will you do with it when you get it, baby? It is not easy man to handle. And from what I heard not be easy to live with him. His wife was very attractive, a girl born and very well educated ... And they say that they were madly in love until he sent on a trip to Europe and took up with a singer. It is a very dangerous man, I would say, what they call a "solo" ... Do you say it?

- Oh, yes. It goes like this, Mom, but you know what it is? It's the kind of man that all women want to tame and keep it to themselves

...

"Very wise of you, chérie ... You're right, but I think it is easy to catch. No, I think I can become a good husband.

- I think it should be a great lover! Lorna said her mother bold and

gave him a reproving look.

"I hope not hear you talk like your father. You know your way of thinking.

- Do not oppose me to marry Steven Morgan! The truth is that I think you'd like. Why do you think he decided to let me go? Despite warnings from his mother, Lorna was careful not to complain of the trip and make sure that Steven Morgan noticed how good horsewoman and sharpshooter was. The more I studied what was most fascinating. It was so different from all the men he had known! And so variable! I had seen him use an impeccable evening dress with the same ease that clothes tattered jeans. And when he condescended to talk a while with them, it was captivating and interesting ... had rolled all over the world and spoke several languages. Lorna decided to find out everything I could about it!

Upon arrival at the port of San Diego, California, got him more attention and the days became more exciting. As proposing a canoe trip, Steven suggested that, if they wished, could travel to San Francisco by boat. The trip would be faster and in the bay, was ready to sail one of the ships of the Line Lady in which he had interests.

"We'll make a scale of one day in Monterrey ... I have a ranch there. It is one of the most beautiful places in the area and have not yet broken. Hence the San Francisco route is clear.

Since he had kissed her that day, she was ridiculously formal ... That thought resentfully Lorna and promised soon to succeed to change my attitude. As they reached San Francisco and appeared a pretender ... change things! We would then not if you paid more attention!

- Do you think, mother, who longs to that ordinary villager to which he paid so much attention on prom night? It is evident that knew each other well ...

"I think that woman treated him and restored him to health after being wounded ...

Mrs. Prendergast told without much conviction because he had also heard other gossip.

- Well, even if they had a mess, I do not think it matters! Lorna said resentfully, Elizabeth Cady erasing from his mind. I guess men need to have fun!

He made a gesture of contempt in his mouth.

It was true that when the Green-eyed Lady had left San Diego, Steven and Elizabeth had forgotten. But what would upset a lot of Lorna, had been aware that the attentions lavished on him were not beyond her habit of being polite. It was just the green-eyed lady who had named the boat, which could not be put off ... And his decision to travel to San Francisco by sea, was a deliberate attempt to exorcise the memory. Back to Monterrey, where he had been obliged to keep Ginny prisoner to cure his addiction to opium. I thought it was something that Ginny had never forgiven him.

Ginny cursed recall ever going to let him alone!

- How long are you staying in San Francisco?

Sam Murdock asked the question, guessing by the grim expression of Steven where his thoughts were.

Steven jerked back to reality.

I do not know yet. Only long enough to see what happens with this issue of mine for a little walk to Mrs. Lorna Prendergast and the surrounding area. Just enough to not seem too rude when you decide to leave.

He captured the pensive look Sam gave him and began to measure the room with long strides.

"I think back to Mexico," he said suddenly.

Sam was looking back to jump the water against the porthole.

"I tenérmelas're very excited to see my grandfather again but someone said something that made me remember that I have some obligations ... Two, actually," she said bitterly. Lo while he wondered whether the two would look like Ginny.

Even after two weeks of being in San Francisco, he received the two letters. One written by Renaldo and the other, much more

dramatic and colorful, with his wife.

Renaldo Ortega, after much thought, he had also written to Sam Murdock who was a friend of Don Francisco. If someone was able to pour oil on troubled waters, Renaldo thought that this man was Sam. Ortega hoped to himself that pride, if nothing else, would prevent Steven ran behind his wandering wife. Maybe Don Francisco was right and that marriage had no choice but to divorce. If Ginny was happy with his new love, God knew he deserved Steven and he had no way to submit and accept that. After all, Steven had never missed women who comforted in his arms!

What neither Renaldo, or Missie, even Don Francisco could know, was that Steven thought his wife was dead. When Sam Murdock, who believed the same, Renaldo opened the letter and got treated, his first reaction was glad that Steven was away, spending one week in Portola Valley with Prendergast and some friends. His first impulse was to get both cards 'being lost' ... But after reluctantly accepted the fact that Steven eventually know the truth. Good God, what a mess! He thought of Ginny who remembered with affection, considering it a lovely woman but unhappy ... at least at the time he had known. What would have led to escape? They seemed made for each other, Steven and she and Steven had never seen a woman so obsessed. What would happen when Steven found out that the wife was crying that she was not dead, but had gone off to Europe with her two children, willing to divorce and marry an English lord who had known God knows where?

Sam was a brave and tough when he needed to be, but, at this stage of his thoughts, everything shook. May God protect Virginia and her future husband, if Steven came to get their hands! And what had been thought his friend Don Francisco to allow such a thing and even encourage it?

Chapter 34

The green meadows of the castle was extended in a gentle slope to the lake where, in a small artificial island, was the summer home. A little beyond was the river, hidden by the willows whose branches bent caressed the rolling waters. On that summer afternoon, two small children played under the watchful gaze of the sitter and the group of elegantly dressed people who drank tea on the terrace overlooking the rose garden. The scene was the idyllic image of a pleasant afternoon. Seeing these people, anyone would think that none of them had reasons for concern. Until the terrace up the faint scent of roses while the solemn butler withdrew to the house, leaving his lady-a silver-haired matron would serve tea to her son and his friend. Celine Dumont concerned eyes looked a little lighter than his son, both young.

Pierre, smothering an oath, sprang from his chair as if he could not bear to sit longer.

"Well, now that Broussard has stopped snooping around here, I ask my question. Michel, what do you think the change that has given my cousin? I hope to speak frankly because I've always had a fondness for Virginia.

Michel Remy, Count d'Artigas, cleared his voice in a somewhat strange before answering. At one time been a lover and protector of Virginia Brandon. In fact, had been about to marry her and, despite the fact that had become entangled in his face with a Mexican colonel forcing him to break the engagement, the truth is I still felt an overwhelming passion for her. Until that point, a few years ago, during Virginia's last trip to Europe was on the verge of leaving his young wife for her. What a buffoon! His friend was not playing fair Pierre asked his opinion and not in front of Mrs. Dumont.

"Yes, please, be frank with Celine Dumont said quietly. He continued, "We have them very concerned, but ... You know ... is so difficult to talk to her without letting you feel our pity ... Do you have pity is the least support!

- Has lost its spark and spirit! Pierre exploded containing the

voice. I am sure you have not failed to notice. He was always so full of vitality ... yes, of iniquity ... You remember how he liked to horse riding ... always inventing something to do not get bored. Now ... Well, you see it! ... He spends his days stuck in your room or with him ...

- Is he not kind to her?

Michel could not help asking the question, and caught the worried look of his friend.

- Oh, he loves her and almost never leaves his side! Pierre said gesturing. But this is not the problem. No, the problem is Ginny and so I am asking for your opinion. After all, you knew her well in Mexico, right? And meet the man who is her husband ...

"It has been suggested that has filed for divorce," said Michel a little uncomfortable. Of course I can not swear!

- But you think it's happy? Pierre persisted. He ran his fingers through his thick blond hair. The lord with whom he plans to marry Tynedale seems a decent man but maybe a bit old for her. And he has money, so that's no problem ... No, what I find is that Ginny is missing something ...

"He's much calmer than before," Michel said tentatively as she tried to collect his thoughts. But have you thought, my Pierre, what to feel ... finally, how you may be able to enjoy things that previously enjoyed if ... "he realized he had to catch his breath before uttering the word if you blind?

Finally he had said, feeling her heart was breaking.

Ginny! Ginny, that of the sparkling green eyes and tempting lips, which had gotten into such a dance, how she could have befallen so horrible tragedy? If the bandit, that scoundrel with whom he had married had something to do with it, and how he would lay a hand on the bastard ... But with total control of herself, she had told him that his blindness was temporary and that her boyfriend was going to take to Vienna for her to see a famous specialist in a short time, the cure. There was no doubt that it had full confidence in Richard, who also was a doctor. Not even now could avoid

jealousy Michel thinking about the man who surely share his bed and enjoyed their passionate embraces. God! What was wonderful! Many times, despite all he had suffered, gladly return back clockwise, provided again enjoy those wonderful months that had been his and his alone ...

For Ginny, the unexpected arrival of Michel to the castle, had brought waves of memories he'd rather forget. Poor Michel! Hoped he had not been too upset or rude when, within minutes of a formal conversation, apologized for withdrawing due to an appointment with the dressmaker, saying it expected him to dinner. Then she wondered if the scene would have been so uncomfortable for him as it was for her. Dear Michel ... No doubt because Pierre had warned noticed how he had acted touch but the truth was ... What was the truth? It was undoubtedly a coward, who preferred to live within the limits of that world security that Richard had created for her. He did not need anything else and least of all, memories.

Sitting in her comfortable armchair beside the window, Ginny could feel the last rays of sun warmed his face and shoulders. The gentle breeze brings the scent of roses and the rich aroma of the cigars that Richard and his visitors would be smoking. Aunt Celine, always proactive, had given them a whole wing of the castle so that they would calm "and feel completely at home, my darling," she had said, and Ginny imagined her beautiful brown eyes covered with tears. Poor aunt! What was he thinking? Pierre had been more open.

"Be happy, that's all that counts.

He said a little harshly. It was hard to imagine that this young man who had always been "the cousin Pierre" had become a prominent lawyer, diplomat and, as some said, next cabinet member. At least for her had not changed at all!

Under the window was a private stone terrace, where the sun was filtering through the tops of old and gnarled trees. When it came to the castle, which for generations had belonged to the family of his

mother to give birth to their children, had fallen for the terrace and the room is now his. That was a time not too happy ... But this time was Richard and also to children. "We are a family had told Richard ...», very happy. And it was true! It was possible that was what had always secretly desired but was too stubborn, stubborn to admit it. Always burning the life and experiences, without stopping to think. But now ... He listened to the distance the laughter of the twins and a smile curled his lips as well. Pierre had promised to paint them. How well he remembered the day he started his own portrait!

Almost unconsciously, Ginny had been listening to the voice of Richard. The bell rope was hurrying her maid staff was close at hand, but Richard liked her tea with an English custom which, with a laugh, had been imposed. It was possible that visitors were preparing to leave because he thought the men's voices sounded closer, as if leaving the room to the terrace.

- Is there any possibility, "said the voice again see that?

Frost, Ginny gasped and heard from Richard with fury:

"He has every chance of seeing when you are ready to do so.

Physically it has no body concerned and when I take her to Vienna to see my friend that, recall the view I had before and see the same thing you and I ...

"Please forgive me if I have provoked his anger, but I'm sure you understand the reason for my questions. For a woman, also blind, the trip to Istanbul with you ...

"It's not blind, it's my wife. And this conversation has come to an end. If you want to go to Istanbul with you, I will, but only because I promised and his uncle, the sultan, some years ago.

"Under Islamic law a man is entitled to have more than one wife.

Was it true what he was hearing or was just imagining it? There was silence after the curt reply from Richard to the objections of his interlocutor. It was possible that he had spoken he were addressing his companion as they descended the stairs to go to the carriage which was waiting without doubt, without realizing that

while sitting in the sun by the window, she could hear everything that was said down.

Ginny dug his fingers into the habit book in her lap. The voices around her had no faces, sounds without pictures. Why could not see? What was the real reason, the reason that Richard's friend was supposed to find? And if ... assuming it is going blind forever ... What then?

Richard had an answer for everything. Even when she asked:

"How can you stand being tied to an invalid?"

"You're not in any way an invalid, my dear. You are a very beautiful woman and who, coincidentally, I've fallen like a madman. I've been fortunate to meet and filled my days and nights of bliss.

As he filled his. Her happiness was that welfare. Is lasting happiness rested not just on welfare? He had been so lucky to meet Richard ... She'd said she was the woman who had reserved the destination and therefore had not been married before. Richard was a man of his word, a man to trust.

The voices were gone and, at any time, Richard show up looking for her. Should greet him with a smile. Love could not be taken lightly, mutual trust was needed. Again that word!

Suddenly, unwittingly sailed his thoughts Ginny two weeks ago when they spent a few days in Paris, leaving the children in the castle to the care of the babysitter. At the request of Pierre had gone together to the theater to see a representation of a company of Spanish dancers and musicians. Then he thought Pierre and Richard were right. I could not live hidden as having a serious illness.

Some friends gossiping Aunt Celine had visited in the box and, amid the general conversation, one of them had said:

- Look, dear, in the box opposite to ours! Is not Princess Di Paoli? The opera singer, do you remember? They say they will do the "Carmen" of Bizet poor in London next month ... He made an enormous success in America I'm told ... What woman is beautiful

and what jewels!

"He's with my friend, the Duke of Courcey-Pierre said, laughing and your account you may be charged, at least, this magnificent diamond bracelet. He says that she thinks that, besides singing, you have to know how to act. Surely this is here looking for Spanish dances.

Ginny felt his ears were ringing and pressure in the chest that could not control. Paoli Di! Luckily at that moment the music started and the vigorous footwork of a dancer as an arrogant cock, accompanied by the clatter of castanets. Ginny could not help it the tears began to flow down his face.

- My dear! Richard whispered in his ear.

But she shook her head, hoping no one would notice anything and picturing the scene where dancing the night looked to the emperor Maximilian in Chapultepec and the handsome Miguel Lopez who took the stage to accompany her. Oh God, how he liked to dance and forget all the frenzy of the dance itself! And now Steven's mistress, the woman he almost married, was enjoying and learning

...

"And I can not even see it! I can not see what that harlot whore!

"Thought Ginny with fierce resentment. On the other hand could look all he wanted, and no doubt the usual gossip and it would have indicated. "Look there, those poor blind creature ... She is the wife of Steven Morgan, who was his fiancée ... "Oh, it was not fair!

And she cried more and more, until the lace handkerchief was completely soaked and Richard had to pass his. After a singer had started one of those plaintive ballads upstage Flemish and Ginny wanted to shut out all sounds ... But I could not. There was nothing that seek to recover before the intermission and afterwards, under any circumstances, ask Richard to take her home. He at least wanted her only!

At that time Ginny heard the door open and he looked up expecting the passionate kiss as she crossed the room toward her,

and hug as if I had not seen for months.

His voice was cheerful.

- Well, my dear! Everything is decided! We're within a week if it would have enough to pack.

Kneeling beside his chair, clasping his hands in his, he was describing the trip and what they would see along the way, painting everything with words and getting so fascinate.

She remembered having read of beautifully illustrated romantic stories about the barbaric splendours of the Ottoman Empire. He remembered the story of Suleiman the Magnificent and the Spanish slave who was called Roxelana Sultana. And the recent history of the premium of the Empress Josephine de Rivery-Aimée Dubuque kidnapped by pirates and had become, sultana and mother of the great Sultan Mahmud. He had read stories about the fabulous Topkapi Palace, the great seraglio with its cage Princess, fountains and marble courtyards, its labyrinthine corridors where the intrigues hatched. Ginny and her friends were astonished wondering how he would feel an innocent girl, sold in the slave market and purchased to be donated to a sultan, after being trained in the art of pleasing. And pray to conquer to get to his bed by the Golden Path, get pregnant and turned into a sultana.

The girl who later get used to assist the intellectual circles of Paris, had fun reading these stories but even then, was convinced that her life as hollow not like it. Living forever cloistered within the walls of a harem, to be the plaything of a man who also could have any woman he wanted! ... No, she did, he would have supported.

"I would plan how to escape ", had exclaimed Ginny. "Although at first have had to pretend he was happy."

"Ah, yes," said one of her friends shudder. "And if you find you and sewn into a sack and throw you over the Bosphorus to drown?"

"Before I would have been death," said Ginny was returning to its geography, maps, looking with disgust.

Now those hated and forgotten maps returned to their memory,

following the descriptions of Richard patients, trying to follow in imagination the route they were going to go.

From France to Austria. That part looked familiar because he knew Vienna. They would take at least a week.

"And we will dance together, you and me, the music of Strauss the Younger. And I'll be the envy of all men!

He said it with boundless enthusiasm make her laugh and forget for a moment what the real reason for the trip to Vienna. From Vienna continue overland to Italy. Venice ...

- Have you ever been to Venice? Then Venice is one of our goals. There is no city like Venice!

Ginny, trying to humor, he smiled.

"I hear that is very romantic. Will you take me for a ride in a gondola in the light of the moon?

"I'll do something more than that, my dear.

He said bowing to her, and for a moment, the geography lesson was forgotten.

That night, later, as Ginny was lying asleep next to Richard who slept with quiet sleep and breathing, she began to imagine the rest of the trip that would take them from one sea to another. Would fall on the Adriatic, visiting maybe some Italian ports, and then go to Greece. Oh, he loved to think of Greece recalling all that had been recorded of its former splendor and wondered what it would be now! They would go to Mykonos Island to visit all painted white villa overlooking the Aegean and Richard thought that buy his Turkish friend who was the current owner.

- You know, dear? The Turks are not very popular right now in Greece and my friend says she would feel very uncomfortable if returned. I think we could take the kids to spend the summer there. And I love you too!

- Sure I would! Describe the rest, Richard!

- You'll see yourself!

He spoke strongly and then followed by telling them that sail up the Dardanelles, the Sea of Marmara, out beyond the Seraglio,

leaving the Golden Horn and Pera on the left to reach Constantinople, the city that the Turks called Istanbul. They would go to the Dolmabahce Palace, built by Sultan Mejid against Bosphorus, in neoclassical style in all its splendor of marble and gold leaf.

- Thank God I'm not one of the concubines of the sultan poor! What a sad way to die, be buried in a sack and thrown into the Bosphorus!

Richard chuckled.

- Hum! ... Does that mean you do not think being faithful? Now, if I were the Sultan, would dismiss other concubines and I would just you. Does a man need more?

After a while, Ginny was a sigh, leaving Richard the endorsement with exquisite tenderness and wisdom, bringing it to extremes of pleasure of which he was always happy to plunge into a deep sleep. He was always so consider your emotions and your joys! Should I ask him where he learned to give such pleasure to a woman! How many would have practiced? The strange thing was that I was not at all jealous of Richard. Could it be that he was developing?

Ginny recalled with resentment something he had said Michel when, clasping her hands, she said goodbye before returning to Paris.

"I wonder if you're happy and you answer you're happy. Think, Ginette. Is that enough for someone who has known the heights and depths? "

Ginny shifted uncomfortably, wondering why he had not slept yet. Strange that Michel would have said that! What did he really say? But ... So what?

Chapter 35

Why it always seems that the preparations and expectations of a long trip last longer than the same trip? Everything had already been back. Cars and leased hotels and villas. Even the gondolas of

Venice and the boring instructions on Turkish etiquette that included a few words of the language. He had learned in Crete was still a Turkish province though the Greeks had my eye on. In Crete also had approached an old withered and sullen that Richard had told her was a magnet, a holy man, for instruction in the teachings of the Prophet.

"You want me ...

"I instruct you and let you repeat a word he tells you. It will not be painful, dear, and do not commit to anything. I ask only because it is better that we are officially married before going to Istanbul. We provide the things you both and I can honestly call my wife.

He was right. After all what did he care to repeat words that she did not even understand. Why would not please Richard insignificant, with everything he had done to please her?

- I'm surprised you still want to marry me! "Said Ginny mocking. Could still be your concubine without the fuss ...

The disappointment of the visit of Dr. Wundt was tormenting Vienna and had broken up the trip to Venice. The doctor had spoken for hours and she had spoken to him, telling him all his life. And then all he had said was:

- Can not you say what you will not see, madam? Once you discover it yourself, you have the key. I'm afraid I can not find it. He had driven mourn, furious display such weakness and Richard had comforted by assuring that he would see. It would take time, but in the end ...

"At some point you'll discover the key to which Wundt speaks. Meanwhile, I love you madly ...

In the meantime I had learned to fend for themselves in many ways. He was able to memorize the location of the furniture in a room, fixed her hair or dress elegy wanted to get guided by touch. "When we get to Pera, not have to lift a finger if you wish. As will be the physician to the sultan will have at our disposal a magnificent house servants and all we need.

Now, glancing at the past, Ginny could hardly believe I was

actually in Turkey, living in luxury and splendor that far exceeded the magnificent residence that Richard had promised him. Never in his wildest dreams had imagined that, a few weeks after arriving in Constantinople, would be sailing through the Bosphorus in a caique protected by heavy curtains that took her to the sultan in Dolmabahce Palace.

How could they have guessed either he was going to happen? The Sultan Abdul Aziz was not only a despot but an eccentric whose hobbies varied every day, who was obsessed with the idea that he would be poisoned. For days, ate nothing but boiled eggs that had to be cooked by the queen mother and to Pertevale same were presented wrapped in black silk secured with the seal of the queen herself. How could one can cope with such a man?

- All I did was to cure an acute attack of dyspepsia! "Richard told him casually. Come outrageous if only hard-boiled eggs! And all sorts of unhealthy food. Aside from drinking too much, despite being Muslim. But he believes saved his life and so ...

- And why? Ginny repeated that he had noticed that he hesitated, even before she said slowly:

"Sweetheart ... You know that I would rather not bring with me? We are commanded to go to the palace of the sultan for me to be near him, if he needs me. I dared not refuse. All I want is to forget as soon as possible that we are here and get a new favorite.

But by the time they were there and she, like Richard, the best they could do was try to take advantage of the situation. To the disgust of Richard, at first Ginny had taken his own situation with humor. They had not been crossed his mind that, while they were living inside the palace, Richard, as a "true believer", he was obliged to act in accordance with Islamic law ... And she too!

Yes, at first, Ginny had found it fun being in a harem, no less, surrounded by slaves who served her. This was the custom, Richard explained a bit puzzled. Not only should occupy the rooms for women, where no man except he could see, but whether he intended to appear in public ... Evening had to go!

"It's only a short time. Think you can bear to live for a few days so repressed?

Poor Richard, thought Ginny, his lips curling into a smile. He was much more upset than she was. He was seriously angry when he had been fooled by the lack of concubines who occupy the spacious rooms that had been intended. It was not so much ...

There was even a walled garden where I could walk every day and even horseback riding. Richard had gotten a horse and a groom, silent man who, according to Ginny involved with apprehension, must be a eunuch. She did too grace the idea of "owning" slaves, but because they were 'gifts' of the Sultan, what could I do? Your personal maid, as Ginny would rather call the girl a sweet voice was a great masseur and a good companion when Richard was not around, saw her and Ginny could not help estars getting used to the spoiled.

Despite a certain lack of freedom-more "felt" that experienced "Ginny enjoyed sybaritic delights of a hot bath in a tub scented. Skilled hands it did everything, even drying and massaging the body with scented essences. And the clothes! ... Although he could not see her, remembering Ginny imagined prints he had seen before. It was enough to enjoy sensual silks which enveloped her body and heavy gold jewelry that adorned her neck, wrists and ankles. The truth was that the clothes worn by Turkish women in the seclusion of their private premises, were much more comfortable and practical than the layers and layers of petticoats, corsets and hoop skirts emballenados who were forced to use European women who wanted to dress according to fashion. He thought he could concoct the letter to her aunt Celine and laughed aloud. "Echoed the girl, with firm and soft hands at the same time, the massage was. Poor aunt, how confused would feel if he could see her niece at the time!

"I really must write" thought Ginny, I have to ask how are the kids and I hope that the answer comes. "I should talk to Richard about it when she returned, once the round of consultations with Abdul

Aziz or any of his nephews. And there was another thing about which it must speak with Richard ...

He felt it was now pregnant again-Richard-and, apparently, the poor kid would be born in the palace of the Sultan of Turkey ...

The golden-haired Circassian who was the favorite of the sultan, was also pregnant and all I did not like the situation, they gave birth at the same time, Richard would give priority to the offspring of the Sultan.

It happened that Richard sent a message telling him that he would be late that night because Abdul Aziz summoned him and did not know how long I would have to stay with her. The two went to dinner together. In a postscript written in English should not be read aloud in Turkish, Richard had written:

"My dear, forgive me, you know where my heart is. I'll go as soon as possible. "

With that, Ginny made a gesture of disgust and decided to make a light meal before going to bed. Dinner was served with the ceremony and splendor usual. Each dish came on silver platters covered to prevent cooling or warming, as the case. I was trying to get used to Turkish food and liked the inevitable pilaff, other dishes were too sweet you like quail golden in butter, garlic and onions which are then cooked in a mixture of rice, raisins, currants and walnuts. Any dish too heavy or sweet but it made him feel nauseous sorbets and mint tea is served after the meals were always a delight.

That night it was difficult to sleep. Fatmeh, her maid, had said the moon was full and, possibly, that was the reason. Ginny mused:

"Will I ever see the moon or I will find out its phase changes only by the tides of my body?" She felt alone and abandoned in a corner of that great marble palace wishing for someone to talk or something to do. She wondered how she would manage the hordes of concubines of the Sultan to keep occupied, guarded by

thousands of eunuchs. Many women and girls slept in groups of five or ten in a room, on mattresses, waiting-and hoping-that the Sultan put his eyes on them. Some of them would not know it was never lie with a man. And all except the last queen-mother-would be banished to the Palace of Tears Andrianápolis when the sultan died. Moreover, women who became pregnant would face all the same fate would be tucked inside a coat that, once sewn, would be thrown into the Bosphorus. Actually what most barbaric country! Ginny thought with a shudder. It was as if civilization had stopped just at the borders of the vast and sprawling empire. "I'm glad the day he can leave." And suddenly lost the ability to continue taking the unusual situation with humor.

It must have been very late or very early, when Richard arrived to join her. Ginny awoke from a restless slumber and found him lying beside her. Was he sleeping? He moved, and he threw his arms.

"Sorry, dear, I could not help it.

He spoke in his ear and he thought he was tired.

- Was very unpleasant? ...

Richard sighed.

"I had plenty of rope tonight. The dinner was endless but he hardly eat. And then forced his soldiers to represent all parodies of battles that we had witnessed. Ginny, I swear I had no idea how far the mind has deteriorated come to accept. When I met him in London seemed too powerful but, anyway, sane. Now ... But who would dare to say out loud? I'm such a coward as they come ... Today has beheaded one of his servants for a trifle. And ruling a vast empire!

"Do not think about it now ...

Ginny tried to calm him. This was no time to talk about anything. Tomorrow, maybe? On a whim, Abdul Aziz was able to spend several days completely isolated with no company but his mother and the Circassian. That was what Ginny was looking forward ... Then she and Richard would have time to talk quietly and make plans. He was separated from the world for everything that was not touch and smell, was doubly closed alone in this universe was the

harem, with no company but the slaves in whom he could trust and with whom he could hardly talk. If he could be in contact with other Europeans the situation would be at least more bearable. Richard had it tight in his arms but did not try to make love and after his outburst, neither said a word. Ginny went back to sleep and this time with a very heavy sleep. When he woke with the singing of birds, Richard was gone once again and just lay before the endless routine of another day I had to let go. That routine that began with a breakfast of fruit and goat cheese over sweet delicacies offered him constantly and also constantly rejected her ... A stroll through the walled garden with scents of herbs and flowers, the procession, the ceremonial bath of pleasure followed by massage, brushing and grooming, the choice of clothing was to be put ...

"If I could see," he said angrily, if I could see, all this might be fun ... Entertainment of the Arabian Nights! "

When Richard returned she was dressed and perfumed, her skin was like silk and just as shiny hair, braided with fine gold chains. She leaned with folded hands and said in his newly acquired Turkish accent:

- Here is your slave waiting to please you!

She broke into tears, a weakness that was shameful was becoming a habit and, lately, seemed unable to control.

Chapter 36

He was comforted in the arms of Richard and his words had calmed. And yet, with the hypersensitivity of those who have lost their sight, she felt a strain in which Richard was steeper and steeper.

She told herself that the tension was because the two were there, his whole life yet the whims of a madman who happened to be the sultan. And Richard was feeling guilty for having taken it. I was sure there were things that Richard did not tell him not to worry even more ... Ginny and ashamed of his tears. He let another time

without telling her that she was almost sure he had his child in the womb. He was resented partly because Richard, being a doctor, had not even noticed.

At least, I still looked beautiful.

- You are so adorable! I am glad that the sultan has seen you because otherwise you would want for him. I'm becoming Turkish. You know that I'm jealous of you think that his nephews were unveiled? I know I have you out of here as soon as possible but we will take all these new clothes you wear and you shall put to me the ...

Then, when they had finished dinner and retired to his chambers, he said without preamble:

"I saw General Ignatiev today. Russia's ambassador is the gate you know?

Ginny, who felt faint and was eager to undress to get into bed, she stiffened.

- Oh! And did it matter in?

Richard said with a sigh:

"I told you were here. It might be useful at some point if ... "She stopped to say cautiously," It's also a friend of the Sultan that relies more on him than the ambassadors of France and England ... to the chagrin of these. I believe that the Czar of Russia is one of the rulers to whom the Sultan respects.

- Did not I also told you that?

Ginny asked the question as saying, while trying to remember.

Richard felt toward him and began to unbutton her light evening dress.

- You told me everything that concerns you!

He said jokingly, but nevertheless, Ginny found that there was something forced behind the joke. With this apprehension came to bed full of pillows under the two shared and this time it was hard to relax. It was as if a part of herself had separated and were observing and questioning.

Why had happened to Richard Conte the Russian ambassador that

she was there? Surely he would have done tactfully ... The illegitimate daughter of Tsar cloistered in a harem ... and just in case ...

What was it that Richard was afraid? What was it that he thought might happen? Gently laid her back on the bed and started sliding his hands all over her body. And for the first time, Ginny began to wonder if the lamps would be lit or not.

"You have a silken skin muttered and she felt his lips on her breasts, are my beloved and my pleasure is to give it to you ... It was true. He was always patient, always considerate, always looking to give pleasure to her. But what about him? Embarrassed, she realized that she had never returned their caresses. I always had endorsed delicately ... Oh, so gently and so tenderly! ... driving them into the most voluptuous delights and getting her own pleasure in a way so discreet that it sometimes hardly noticed, as he was wrapped in his own gratification.

How selfish I have been contrite, he thought, I should have ... I should have ... "

He reached out to pet him as he stroked her and felt that he withdrew.

- Richard! ...

- No! You're not a belly dancer, you're not a slave bought and trained in the art of providing pleasure. You are my beloved, whom I adore ... for whom I have the privilege of worship. Let me love you, my dear, as you deserve.

The next day afternoon, Ginny received a visit. It was obviously a very important visit because it was Fatmeh-arranging the hair-sprayed with a bottle of expensive perfume the tiles on which his feet when the eunuch who guarded the door trembling voice announced:

- Madam, do you salaam!

Fatmeh whispered to hurry up with a timid voice, and Ginny

imagined kneeling with his head against the floor. Well, not anyone at ... She would not do such a thing!

Anyway did the reverence they had been taught to do before being presented to the Empress Eugenie few years earlier. Pertevele The queen mother was an important person and deserved respect. And besides, he had to think of Richard ...

- Do you speak French?

The tough French accent of the Sultana was difficult to understand. But Ginny nodded to offend.

"Well, then we can talk.

Behind her she heard rustling of cloth and whispering voices, which made Ginny assume that the Sultana had been accompanied by a large entourage. After a moment the visitor said:

"You may sit down.

Felt hands-those of the guided-Fatmeh up a cushion where she sat cross-legged as he had been taught.

Now what could he do? Does a drink? I had no idea of how the protocol. God! Richard should have prepared. Undoubtedly going to consider it was a savage. Perhaps the best thing would confess his ignorance.

In a very well spoken French, Ginny apologized for not being prepared to receive a visit so distinguished and not knowing how to behave in a similar occasion. The smell of the attar was almost dizzy with despair and thought that it was not going to march in any way. What would you do with it then throw out a window to the Bosphorus?

- "So you're blind? Are you offend Tynadale's wife, whose real name is Fuad? Are you married under the laws of Islam?

How dare asking personal questions? Ginny was tempted to answer accordingly and bit her lip to keep the caustic words to say that was on the tip of the tongue. He tried to answer calmly:

"Yes, I married my husband under Muslim law on Crete. Y. .. and now I can see though my husband assures me it will pass. Can I offer you a drink?

"Later. My daughter and I have brought our sweets. Everything passing through our lips must be specially prepared, but of course you did not know that.

That crumb he threw as he throws a bone to a dog, Ginny made him grind his teeth. Intimately felt humiliated and family remembered the old adage: "If I could see, was capable of anything ..."

Another voice, belonging to a much younger woman, also said in a grueling French:

"My mother and I are here because I wanted to know. And also because I wanted to know this place. Because when you come to live here, there must be enough room for all my slaves. And place for you, of course.

- What? ...

Just say it, Ginny realized that the word had been floating through them like an ice shelf.

- Sure! He should not have had time to tell yet. My son, Sultan, had not been decided so far, .Era again the voice of the woman, trying to smooth things over. My daughter is his favorite sister Gulbehar and therefore is not married yet. But of course you know that a follower of Islam can have more than one wife ... So do not think it's surprising.

"I'm sure we'll be like sisters," said the younger falsely sweet voice. I'll make sure you have more slaves to assist her because the fortunes of a man is measured by the number of people who serve him. And my brother is a generous master.

Cautious, measuring his words Ginny managed to say:

"Sorry to seem stupid but I do not understand at all. Are you saying ...

"My son said dryly the Sultana Valide, has decided to marry my daughter with her husband. It is the highest honor that can perform. My son does not usually rely heavily on anyone.

"My brother," said the girl was kind enough to ask me my opinion. I have observed one's husband through the lattice and is truly a

handsome addition to having the good fortune to be very healthy.
Or you have not had the luck of never having seen his face?
Maybe I can describe it when you're here.

The choking the stream of words and the effort that was done to control their emotions. It should have had to mourn but would not do it in front of those women who could face it and watch as she could not see their faces.

- When will the ceremony?

He asked the question in a voice as cold as steel and asked them to bring refreshments.

When Richard arrived they were gone. He was in the garden, absorbing all the perfumes and listening to his horse's hoofs nervous, unable to move the marble bench where she sat as if he too had become marble.

"Ginny ...

It was a whisper but she was also dying agony and could not turn her head toward him.

- You or I had imagined it came as a surprise as I do?

- Oh, my God! I had no idea, I swear! After ... after he made the announcement, I knew you had views.

She sat beside him but Ginny knew that he dared not touch her.

"Ginny ... believe me ... I ... I'm desperate ... I do not know what to do!

"Not much you can do, right? "I long ago after leaving them, he had dried his tears. I understand that you feel completely helpless ... as I do. But you must tell me exactly what that means ...

At that time he put his arms around her against it.

- How would not have brought you here! I would not have come again! It was all pretty difficult before, but now ... Do you understand that I have not had anything to do with this, he had no idea what he was up to? If I could ... but my will and not mine. My master, the Sultan has given me her favorite sister and I have no

way to refuse. Tell me you understand. You must understand!
A part of him understood. So much to learn that Richard, loving her and loved her, thought more about her safety than his own. But what meant this new marriage? He did not dare ask for fear of what he could reply. Stories that Ginny had heard about, came now to his memory. Wives or concubines who became pregnant by the same man by far than a week or a few days. "It would be the same between her and the sister of the Sultan? Naturally a new marriage would bring new responsibilities. Richard would have to take to bed his new wife ... What then?

He swore he loved her and nothing more than her. There would be no difference in their relationships. And anyway it would be a situation that would endure for only a short time. Sooner or later, the Sultan would find another doctor and another husband's sister. The divorce was very easy for a Muslim.

Ginny realized that she was comforting him, not that his brain had been made yet by the enormity of what they were facing them. He spent a night without him to tell Richard that he suspected she was pregnant. And yet another. At last he said in the most inopportune moment, the night before he married a second time ... with another woman.

"I think ... I think I'm pregnant. Sorry to tell you right now, but for days I've been looking for the right moment ... Not that this is the right time but ...

Broke as she had hoped to do so in other circumstances. Joy, excitement, anxiety, and a passionate self-reproach.

How could I go through the charade of the ceremony of marriage now? Maybe the princess changed his mind, to avoid being relegated to the position of second wife. And as for Ginny, he must rest, should not ride, should ...

She could not help laughing a little, probably in reaction to the tensions that had arisen between them lately.

"But you're a doctor, Richard, and I may be wrong. Please ...

He insisted examine himself, confirming what she already knew

by instinct. But still, it was too late to turn back in the marriage with the Sultan's sister and they both knew.

Ginny locked himself in his chambers of the harem, pretending that everything was in order but could not stop listening to the bustle and voices, across the marble courtyard, were several members of the retinue of the princess who were coming to the dowry and all her belongings. The formal ceremony of marriage could last for days and, anyway, it was easy for Richard can go back to it soon. The more I thought more and more impossible it seemed nightmarish whole situation. Even his feelings seemed to have been hidden as it was hidden. I could not think of anything but see how she spent the day and even then, was an effort. Then he realized how dependent Richard.

Chapter 37

What Ginny found it harder to bear was that Gulbehar was determined to cultivate his relationship with her. Especially since the son of Richard had started to deform the stomach.

Richard himself had said shyly that it was likely that the poor girl was very lonely. He seemed to think it was as much a victim as Gulbehar them and, therefore, worthy of pity. Ginny was forced to reject such a comment. Whatever he said seemed to be a jealous bitch ... Or a woman for whom he had to feel compassion for her "delicate condition". Either way everyone was involved in an unusual and uncomfortable situation, thought Ginny, striving to show compassion. Richard was spending most of her time with her, and that no longer make love as it was advancing the state of pregnancy, it was only because he loved her and cared for their health. Usually sat with her until she fell asleep, lulled by the gentle voice she read to her.

Ginny tried not to think how many times or when she was with another wife, although she knew she did. Better to not know and did not feel inclined to dwell on the subject. He just had to worry about the child, Richard was sure it would be a boy, and his own

health. He repeated it again and again.

The days passed and was also assumed that week. Time had ceased to have meaning and, as the child grew in her womb and her movements became more heavy, all we hoped and prayed it done as quickly as possible and feel free again.

"This time you will not suffer any pain," he said Richard. I promise, dear, there will be pain ... When the time comes you'll be at your side and all you have to do is listen to my voice. I'll overcome the trance without having to go through the agony you went through last time. Do you still trust me?

"Yes ..." she murmured.

He bent to kiss her ... The tender passion was becoming until finally, smothering an oath, he leaned back.

- How I wish! The wait is almost unbearable ... My love, do not doubt my love!

At that time a letter came from Aunt Celine gave him new courage. If only for the outside world know that remembered its existence. The children were well and happy. Laura Louise had a cold and a slight fever but was soon improved. Or Franco-Francis, as everyone called him-was beautiful. Everyone missed and hoped he would return soon.

Waves of nostalgia gripped her heart and had to struggle not to pout like a baby. It was almost better to go to meet Gulbehar in the garden at that hour of the evening was delicious-that sit in your room brooding over his despondency. Richard, after reading the letter, had gone away. And she had never cared to be alone, lack of company he was now intolerable. I could not read and could not sew. The music I listened to sounded quite strange, with its sensual and undulating rhythms. Nothing around her and her family was not in his power to remedy ... Such was its importance ...

"But I'm not an invalid," he thought, I have not lost more than one of my senses and even that, only temporarily. I can not forget that.

I think, make plans and hope ... "

Through the arches and windows open a breeze reached him playing with the loose strands of her hair and she carried the heavy scent of musk, amber, attar of roses and also the slight scent of herbs. Outside the world existed, even within the walls of a walled garden. And unless she believed it was not a prisoner. It might be that the key to which had been referred by the learned Dr. Wundt. As the "Lady of Shalott" Tennyson's poem, he had just read, "was decidedly up. He knew the way to the garden. Must pass through the courtyard of marble which gave her room, skirting the bathroom and get well, through an archway covered with vines, to the garden of tinkling fountains and fragrant flowers.

You did not call Fatmeh. There was an invalid and needed no guide. He paused at the door for guidance and felt dejected. He began to remember the time that had been inadvertently becoming opium slave living in a kind of twilight of which only came out every time she took a little dust. And how had suffered, however reluctantly, out of drug dependency! Steven had been harmful and had hated him, without ever really have forgiven him. Steven, who was now free to marry whomever he wanted. Would the Di Paoli? "I do not care. He do not care. I have given my life a different direction!" Is said Ginny. Brushed past the door of his room and heard the echo of his footsteps in the compound marble bathrooms.

In the garden, as expected, was eating his favorite cake Gulbehar-gobegi Kading, Lokman and khoshab baklava-and sipping a drink made with peaches and other fruits, scented with musk.

When she appeared there was a commotion of voices and movements. Among those highlighted the very acute Gulbehar, feigning a concern that was far from sincere.

- Have you got here without her maid? He could have fallen into the bathrooms and our lord and master had been very sad. Navs, helps the other wife of my husband to sit ... yes, there among the pillows.

Almost without pause, the shrill voice continued sputtering:
"Have some sweets are freshly made and are delicious. My servants have found a bakery in Pera, owned by Alexandria. And take some ayran, is very good in your state. I have also begun to take it from ...

There was some mockery in Gulbehar attentions. Ginny tried a gooey pecan pie who did not find any taste and, in contrast, the suggestion was chewing the last words.

- Are you pregnant too?

He spoke in his best French. The drink tasted very bitter while awaiting the reply that came in the same language and clearly.

"I've been blessed and I pray to Allah to give him a son to my master ... and many others .Después a pause and false voice continued: "Is it true that you were married before and have other children?

Ginny knew the importance that the Turks gave to the virginity of their women and felt the impact of the dart which had launched. But it did more than shrug indifferently and replied:

"Yes, twins ... Richard intends to take.

He wanted to see the face of Gulbehar.

After that, only his pride prevented him from returning to their rooms immediately. He tried to keep her chin as he drank his yogurt, ayran was supposed to be so good for your state. Listen I really do not understand and a love song, "he explained solicitous Gulbehar-sung in a shrill voice.

From a distance we heard some shots that put her tense and it blew up, so they could hear around them, it was realized that the war games of the Sultan. Finally, to the relief of Ginny, spent long enough so he could retire politely.

"Richard will come to me, he thought and felt ashamed because he thought a form of defeat and felt his spirit had finally surrendered. Could Gulbehar had allowed to become a rival? It was all circumstances. I was beginning to adapt, terrible word. Obviously, Richard would return with her ... And of course the two would

agree that a prisoner was not there but his own will ... because I had to stay. Was that the exact truth? Was it perhaps a prisoner to itself?

Ginny had made his way to his room and was about to call Fatmeh who was always there, when the first pain took her by surprise, bending at the waist. He clung to the edge of the bed and clothes, crumpled between his fingers clenched, she fell to the ground. He felt as if she plunged a knife into the belly, as if the two, crossing it with a lunge after another.

Probably had a scream. There were voices around her, held her hands, shadows that spoke to him ... And all I could do was scream until they had no voice, feeling pain after the other and thinking, 'Not a time, can not be! "Until it plunged into darkness.

Even in the midst of his unconsciousness followed her tormenting pain. These were the pains and the pains he remembered, he woke up sobbing and with bated breath. And he saw Steven's face bending over her. It took a while to realize-and this only after hearing him speak, it was not Richard Steven but that was beside him. And yet it took longer to realize that once looked as if nothing had happened.

Before he could speak, the voice of Richard began to calm, free from the pains such as knives were digging into the body, as if to crush it.

- No! ... No, no ...

The voice he heard was his own, but seemed to come from someone else.

"Hold me. Here is my hand. Tighten, dear. Now the pain is happening. You go to sleep ... not to die, you know? I'll be listening to me ... You will not hear another voice than mine ...

His voice ... And then nothing more until much later, when he opened his eyes to sunlight, he saw the silk tapestries covering the walls, blue-tiled roofs and floors covered with tiles also shone like mother of pearl.

Everything I saw - oh, God, I was watching again! - I saw with

remarkable clarity and brightness but at the same time, saw him dispassionately, as if from far away ... even Richard.

It was a very handsome man despite the faint marks left him by smallpox. An ivory-skinned man. They were his blue eyes, black hair and maybe something in the shape of the mouth, which had reminded both Steven at first. But Steven never have seemed so tired and so worried.

"Ginny. Oh, dear, do not ever close your eyes! His hands, his strong hands holding hers firmly. You are with me again ... Each day that passes you will become stronger. You're going to heal completely, you hear?

Like everything around her, his voice also seemed remote.

- Why was not going to cure me? Richard, why do I feel so weak? What has happened? All I can remember is the pain ...

He was transfigured face, clenched his jaw and looked away.

"You ... would not you'd asked me yet but I can not lie. You lost the baby. I do not know what was the reason ... something you ate or drank, maybe. But what matters is that you're alive and here with me, pressed his hands .Le harder until he complained about the weak and reluctantly loosened. From now on I will be more time with you. I promise. I will care.

Why should he be cared for? As he recovered ... Once again fell asleep, keeping it on the bed very reluctantly.

Everything I had read of the Turks and their history will again parade through the mind. The experiences that had happened since his arrival should have been alerted. Recovery of sight and lost a son ... "An eye for an eye? ... Now, when we brought to eat or drink, he said very politely:

"Please, try it first. You know what I'm demanding.

And when Richard returned to his side, said openly:

- Do you poisoned, right? Someone wanted to kill me o. .. me lose the baby.

"You're tired, darling, having lost the child ...

There was no conviction in his words and his eyes held her gaze.

He was upset, tired and marked deep dark circles under her eyes. I saw wisps of gray hair at the temples and stretched her hand to stroke. I wanted to comfort him because he had always comforted her and had always offered him her love.

"Richard ...

He returned to circumvent it.

"General Ignatiev comes tomorrow. Want to talk to you.

- Will you allow me to see?

Do not take cognizance of his left mockingly.

"You must be veiled, of course. Sorry, dear, but for now you must understand that ...

"I can not understand what I can not accept. Neither the veil, or the forcible detention. She probably accepted because he was born here. He tried to kill me because he wanted his son to be born first. The history of the harem is full of similar stories. What are you doing, Richard, with all this?

She saw him shudder at the grim reality of the facts which clearly displayed. And she shuddered inwardly. I still wanted to approach him. If you take her in his arms ... If you promised to take her in any way ... If you do something, anything, rather than stay at her as if he had mortally wounded ...

At last I saw bow your head and pressed her hands to her temples, suddenly realizing that if he knew that now he could see it had not made such a gesture of despair. For some reason-perhaps because he had decided not to, she had not said anything.

I was about to tell him when he raised his head and looked at her with an expression that he would have preferred not to have regained sight. Her voice sounded empty, devoid of all feeling.

- What do I do? I wanted to wait before you tell replenished. But since the situation has forced ... I'm going to divorce you, Ginny. The laws of Islam makes divorce easy for men. All you have to do is repeat three times "I divorce you", and it's done. Tomorrow, in the presence of a magnet and you say the words depart from here. Ignatiev knows your history and has promised to make to arrive

safely to St. Petersburg.

Chapter 38

General Ignatiev, a tall, gaunt and imposing mustache, he made only a brief interrogation. It was one of the most humiliating experiences of his life. Did you know the Tsar? Had he been in court? Who is the godfather? Ah ... She had been married a Russian and knew the Tsar's personal physician. Yes, well. Ginny had the impression that he did not think nothing or very little of what he said. And he said little except that he had no desire to go to St. Petersburg.

The general was limited to looking at her like a fly or other insect unpleasant.

"I understand that you have left is ... is a 'protected' the Czar, my lord. I have therefore arranged the way you split with an escort to St. Petersburg. If St. Petersburg is a place for you too vulgar, it will be very easy to go from there to other side and, sure enough, escorts are not going to miss.

She gave him a cold stare to put in its place and then silenced his protests with the following words:

"If you can naturally stay here ... if you prefer this life that has had occasion to try ... As I understand the Prince Abdul Hamid has expressed interest ...

He had not seen Richard since he had spoken the words of divorce. I hardly saw anyone, except the general condescending. And, at that point, all I craved was freedom ... healthy and civilized place, on the other side of the walls that surrounded it. Now he had lost his only contact with the outside world, Ginny found out only by vague rumors of what was happening. There were some groups-such as the Young Ottomans, made up of Turkish secularists, who made more noise in other countries than Turkey itself. Midhat Pasha, a leader of the Young Ottomans, had been banished to a distant province. But now that the present Grand Vizier was pro-Russian, was said to be appointed vizier

Midhat Pasha. There was also much concern in Bulgaria, where two bad harvests had led the people to the brink of revolution. General Ignatiev had too much in hand and, in due course, Ginny was escorted travel under the personal protection of one of its own "protected", Colonel Taras Shevchenko Barsovche.

Wrapped in a heavy veil left the Dolmabahce palace through a door not closed the garden, overlooking a small stone pier. Getting into the gaily painted caique with silken canopies, Ginny saw the blue waters of the Bosphorus for the first time, and before her, the distant shores of Asia and green.

He had not said a word the whole time, ignoring the huge and blurred Russian officer, who sat opposite her, had her arms crossed over his chest. The uniform resplendent with medals, and judging by his somber expression, he seemed more excited about the trip that she would share it.

Through the thin veil covering her eyes, Ginny continued watching it all, more than anything to avoid falling into depressive ruminations. She had cried and had suffered enough for the rest of his days! Part of his life was already behind ... She thought again of Richard who surely had forced her to leave because he feared for his life. The pain expressed in his face when he said he was going to divorce her, was more than obvious ... And I had not given the opportunity to discuss or ask. She felt empty and cold inside, but making a deep breath of fresh air smelling of the sea lifted her chin in a gesture of pride under horrible black veil. From now on would be completely independent! Never again would tie for a man or depending too much on anyone. Even the constant concern of Richard had become stifling. Protected it like a baby and she had agreed in turn to the role. Never again!

The Russian broke the silence.

"There the Golden Horn and Pera on this side. The next Constantinople, the Turks called Istanbul.

Obviously they did not speak much English and did so with bad accent but at least trying to be polite. Ginny nodded, bent on his

silence but he followed the direction he pointed with his hand and could not help a sigh of anguish to see those places that had remained static for centuries.

They sailed toward Constantinople, passing out where he was the old Seraglio Topkapi palace, hiding in dark cypresses and willows. Through the sea had come hundreds of young captive, chosen by the Sultan as slaves, they would never leave the harem. Ginny flinched and accidentally chose to look at Pera, with its buildings of red and white tiles spread across the hills covered with vines to the mountain peaks. Was where many Europeans lived. The church steeples were outlined against the sky like the domed minarets. When he glanced back, saw the sun shining marble palace and called Dolmabahce gold leaf, with its tall Greek columns, and the handful of buildings surrounded by the ubiquitous cypress trees leaning against the mountain. She would never see him again. Before them was Constantinople, built, like Rome, on seven hills. The colonel cleared his throat. Ginny could tell he was finding it very difficult to cope with the journey with silent and veiled women. God, she thought. The more upset he felt at his side, it would be easier to convince him that there was no need to accompany all the way to St. Petersburg. Ginny followed was determined not getting carried from one place to another like a chess pawn. No less than St. Petersburg! ... Their children-and therefore all that bound her to the world, were in France.

"We've arrived," said Colonel without Shevchenko.

He looked very relieved. Ginny looked at him attentively for the first time, wondering what he would have told her. He looked like men with primitive appetites and enjoyed the company of primitive women. Although he was barely taller than she, had the physique of a fighter, broad shoulders and chest. Her hair was dark and curly on the forehead, with a few streaks of gray at the temples. A rich and thick mustache covered his mouth with thick lips. Would forty or forty-five? It was difficult to say and really do not care anymore. It would be a burden to the colonel the shortest

time possible!

Still veiled, appearing to be in the eye of any onlooker Turkish idle a respectable lady, was left by the official escort to their barracks. Stiffly informed him that of course he would lie in the embassy until they leave. Meanwhile he would bring his luggage and, if so desired, the maid who had been hired to help him unpack. If I had needed something more to say. She again made a bow. He saluted, clicked his heels together and left. At last she was alone!

- Do not talk to me! "Complained the superior officer Colonel Shevchenko, maintaining its position of" firm "before the general's desk. I looked my way, I pointed out the sights that we passed, I left my home owner and my servants ... And yet ... not a word. Is deaf, perhaps?

- But what nonsense! "Replied the general.

His eyes were busy in the stacks of papers piled on the desk and wrinkles of concern crossed his forehead. Bulgaria's problems had worsened and sensed a social explosion. He wondered how he should take it ... I knew that Turkish troops had been dispatched to the troubled province as well as a detachment of Circassians fought not for pay but for what they could scavenge. Things did not seem to be going well ... Or was it the best that could have happened? There were a number of loose threads that, well managed, they can give a good result ... And in such circumstances had to be worrying about a woman!

The general finally raised his eyes and saw the anxious face of his friend, Colonel Shevchenko. What the hell you just said Taras? Well, it did not matter ... It was a good man and would only obey orders.

- It is very possible that the lady is the daughter of the Tsar himself. He was in court, and thanks to him, did many things in recent years. Addition was formally married to Prince Sakrkanov, who was one of my predecessors here. Are you aware of the

extremely sensitive nature of his mission?

A few words more carefully-chosen-and Colonel Shevchenko was well aware of how delicate and difficult task. To St. Petersburg had to escort a lady who, though born in America, was a Russian princess who owned property in Russia itself. If completely fulfilled its mission, their chances of promotion are much higher.

The general said in deadpan that the lady in question was very attractive ... Or at least that he was told. If it was the same woman and, indeed, everything seemed to assume that it was.

The Englishman got to Turk, who was her husband, noticed me being the only foreign ambassador to the Sultan who is confident to the point of allowing me to visit. The man was very anxious to ensure that the Lord will come safely home.

He did not say is that that lady was not very well prepared.

Discovered that the colonel and saw for themselves how to cope.

As for himself, the general thought he had done all he could and ended at that point, their responsibility.

A few hours later with a new uniform and carefully trimmed mustache, Colonel Taras Shevchenko Barsovch showed up at his own house, under the pretext of finding out if his guest did not lack anything. Was a little excited by the copious libations of vodka he had shared with his buddies and small doses of information that the general had dropped Ignatev had aroused his curiosity. Very curious ...

He stood at the door of the room when the servants announced it timidly. And much to his dismay the Colonel seemed to have lost the gift of speech. Instead of the veiled Turkish woman who had left, had before him a young woman dressed in the latest European fashion, hair combed in a bun with braids laid bare left him perfect ears and a twinkling diamond earrings. His eyes studied him calm and admittedly, were a bright green ... and mouth ... Caught staring at that mouth, Colonel blushed and bowed a little late.

"I came to see if ... if there was anything ...

- How much kindness on your part! Really need ...

Actually it turned out I needed a lot of things. Writing paper, pen and ink ... I had to write several letters ... And champagne.

- Champagne?

- Is it possible to get here? As you know, in the harem not accept alcoholic beverages. I'm really eager to drink champagne. Ah, yes! And the U.S. Embassy would like to visit if possible. I am a citizen of the United States.

"Almost all the foreign embassies are in Pera.

Ginny would have preferred to have left her with those red-rimmed eyes bulging.

"We leave tomorrow for St. Petersburg so it is very difficult to have time ...

"Colonel, now looked serious and challenging, I will not go to St. Petersburg. I will write a letter to my ... the Czar that, if you wish, you can give yourself, so that both you and the general Ignatiev be absolved of all responsibility. But you must understand that I have two young children in France and that is all I want to meet them.

- Madam, I have orders to take you to St Petersburg!

"And the only way you will have to take me there as a prisoner ... a prisoner very stubborn, I'd say ... What are you doing? And he added angrily, watching his reaction: "Are you going to shackle? Princess Romanov and I have committed no crime against the state.

- Of course not! But anyway, you're going to St. Petersburg. My orders ...

"Colonel Shevchenko do not belong to the Russian armed forces. I refuse to follow those orders. You can tell the general Ignatiev. Or if you're afraid to tell you, I'll do it myself.

He looked at her not believing what he heard. What was challenging! What's more, was challenging the general! But that would happen for a fool he was, unable to control the whims of a woman.

He stepped toward her, but was controlled in time, telling him firmly.

"General Ignatiev has ordered me to take her to the Tsar in St Petersburg and that's what I do by hook or by crook. But I think you will accept to go!

She was exploring every inch and noticed the veins in his temples swelled and huge hands that was nailed to the sides. It looked like a wild bear, a man capable of uncontrollable violence. Should use other tactics?

Ginny sighed and nodded looking at his hands clenched.

He lowered his voice and asked:

- You separate a mother from her children? At least let me take them to Russia to me. Please. Somewhere in the order you have "is forbidden to make a detour to get to St. Petersburg?

He took it by surprise and hesitated before answering:

"I'll ... I have to talk to the general of that. But already planned that we would leave tomorrow by sea to Sevastopol ...

Chapter 39

The colonel had left, probably to see the general. Again alone, Ginny began pacing around the small house like a restless cat. It was late but there was no question of sleep. His mind was too busy and troubled to think about staying in bed in a contemplative attitude. He felt having spent months resting, wrapped in a cloak of protection and tenderness ... Yes, and love! Richard had loved her and she had loved him. He liked being cared for, pampered and spoiled and now ... It was difficult to say what he felt at that time.

"I must be very superficial," he thought. "How could have if not removed Richard from the head so soon? I'm selfish ... "Perhaps the word is not fair. It seemed as if losing the baby she carried in her womb, not only blood but had lost the ability of deep feelings. I had already learned to control their feelings and go through life with lightness and carelessness like a butterfly. Feelings only

served to suffer.

Anxious to demonstrate its capacity to decide, Ginny opened a bottle of vodka he had seen before, poured a cup overflowing and provided in the mirror. The image the mirror back at him as he drained in one gulp and winking the contents of the cup, was a very pale face with large eyes and haggard. Eyes that had seen ... should not be forgotten.

Time opium brought him back to oblivion. Now there was no opium, but ... vodka could serve ... She locked the door and sat on the couch, making sure to leave the bottle by hand on a table inlaid in ivory. She began to feel heat in the body. Shortly before shivering, I felt cold inside like an iceberg.

"Semper libera!" Gave remembering the name of an aria from La Traviata. Free forever. No more ties. As for testing, said aloud: "Richard !»... And missed. Richard had always comforted when she was unhappy when darkness oppressed her. Richard made love tenderly, not break them as Steven ... Richard would never violate a woman.

How does yours have done Gulbehar? Had she done with the same tenderness and the same dedication to her?

"Richard ... Richard '... Repeating his name not appoint another. Richard Steven greatly resembled but were different. How could two people who loved and hated at the same time? A Richard had not hated or never hated him now. It was the vodka and not his thoughts what he was given a headache. Should have insisted on champagne. Why could not that stupid Russian colonel? ... The pounding of his temples began to rumble like drumbeats.

"My God!" Ginny pressed both hands against their ears, the blows stopped and the door opened with a violent crash. He saw it planted there ... this man who looked like a bear with a crate of champagne under his arm and began to laugh.

- I was conjuring! I was just thinking of you and here it is ... with my champagne. What alert! Only ... now I'm more than a little drunk with vodka ...

- Oh! Is that what he was doing? The servants thought that was killing you! So you found my vodka, no? It is much better than his silly French wines! Perhaps you are more Russian than you think! He approached her to spend carelessly leaving the case of champagne on the table.

Ginny frowned.

- I do not like the Russians! She said icily. I was once married to one and did not like! "And then, surprised," What are you doing here?

"I thought you would like to hear the good news. At least are partly good and partly bad.

He sat beside her on the couch and gesturing, casually, he began to unbutton his uniform jacket.

- Do you hear me now or take a little more vodka before? Would you rather have for you is champagne?

"Champagne" answered automatically, and then angrily, "What are you doing?

- What do you think? I'm getting comfortable. Ah! Now I can breathe!

Ginny blinked and saw him cross the room to the case of champagne and open a bottle with ease with these hands like hammers as she stared in amazement.

- Champagne! He said and let out a loud laugh. I have a quick and easy to open these bottles.

And he proceeded to break the neck of the bottle on the edge of the table. He did it with one blow, razor sharp, and returned with the foaming bottle to her, allowing the fluid to gush out. He filled the glass showering.

- You are a maniac! Shouted angrily, thinking that she too was. He had to be!

- Have a drink and see how you feel better! "And he supported the crown against his lips no choice but to let him obey.

- End it, finish it! I bring more ... You know! Yes .. and I'm glad to be back. Nor have I forgotten what you wanted.

- You're drunk!

He tried to speak in a voice choked with anger but he laughed so hard he had no choice but to laugh too.

- Drunk? Of course I'm drunk! But you also ... You too! But it is a lovely woman, under that horrible wasted wearing veil when I first saw it. I'm sure that was also missed by the happy husband had. A woman like you ...

- You know nothing about me!

He continued drinking the champagne family enjoying the fizzy taste.

"No, maybe not yet ... But I know women. What do you think I'm back here tonight? Give me a kiss!

Before he realized, had caught in his arms and pressed against his body while his lips covered her mouth.

- Stop!

Ginny tried to stop him but his lips would not let her talk and no possible defense, he felt as he introduced his hands on her breasts. It was a good way to forget! Pure Sensuality! Nothing more, thank God! He was right, was right this huge man, rough and hairy ... It was exactly what she was needing!

- What is most beautiful small breasts! What beautifully formed! See how it fit in my hands? Exactly as I like!

He continued making fleeting comments about the different parts of his body, as the undressing was without wasting too much time to unfasten the hooks closed dress. And she did nothing to stop it knowing it was too late to try and also knowing that I did not want to try. No, not even when doused in champagne and began to taste hungrily, noisily kissing her whole body.

That man was nothing more than a brute animal, a typical Cossack! And yet that same toughness, the absolute lack of delicacy, made very reluctantly, to make your body respond, letting you do whatever she wanted with her until she finally managed to get to that point of total oblivion he wanted.

At a certain time of night began to get cold on the couch and he

carried her to the bed-the bed of which he half-dreams it seemed very natural. After she fell asleep and warm because he was protecting his body. And the next morning, when he still was not quite awake, make love again forcing her to respond with their games bear ... Biting her breasts, pushing with their hands every part of your body until delivered again, finding that provides a perverse sense of relief.

"I was born to a whore, she thought before leaving to be completely focused on her sensuality.

At least he had not even mentioned the game. When he opened his eyes, Ginny had no idea what time it was or whether it was night or day. The heavy shutters of the room were closed and the room smelled of liquor and sour night of love. She tried to move but his body was crushed by a leg as heavy as a tree trunk.

He should have realized he was trying to escape because he straightened up and leaned over to her.

- Ah! Already awake again? Are you ready for another round? Do you know? I've never met a woman as wonderful as you ... And believe me I have a few women throughout the day ... I hope not having displeased saying that, huh! I was surprised as a female expert and sensual ... And that was lucky for us both, do not you think?

"I'd take a bath" suggested Ginny.

He chuckled.

- I thought so! I gave orders for the woman who had everything prepared ... Y. .. Do not oppose me to meet you? Back home I'm not much given to shower but ... With this weather! Come on then! We brush each other's back, eh?

Ginny could not believe he had been allowed to reach such familiarity with "the Cossack" as had been called to himself. He must have been crazy last night! But anyway, he and she were here and it was possible he could convince him that you avoid the trip to Russia.

Just as things were, did not have to worry about.

While they were frozen juice of pomegranates blended with tangerine, Ginny let the Cossack massaging her back and give him the "news" last night.

- You upset me last night, dear, that's the truth! But I brought the champagne y. .. The devil's tail ... I thought I would celebrate ... Or maybe not ... depends on what you would like the Turks.

- What do you mean?

"In Bulgaria there has been an uprising. It began in the mountains surrounding a village called Batak. I had not heard of him in my life but the general says that soon the whole world know it. They, I mean the Turks, drowned the revolt with his customary brutality. But this time a newspaper correspondent was witness to the events and saw burned a church with women and children inside! You may be arme terrible war with that! Do you understand? The British and Americans are more sensitive than we are Russians. Ginny turned to see him better and saw her face shining like a giant genie.

- So you do not have to go to Russia?

"You are very quick thinking, eh?

He leaned over her giving him a spanking in the right place before continuing.

-No. Not having a threat of war. Last night the general did nothing but listen and then began to recede. All I have to do is make sure you safely out to France in the first boat. Do not you feel better now?

Three days passed before it was possible to get a boat to go to France and had vacancies. During that time, Ginny felt a toy. Colonel Cossack was both insatiable and tireless. She was so stunned he did nothing to eat, he loved to eat, drink, make love and sleep. They reported three cases of bottles of champagne and countless bottles of vodka. He used and enjoyed without mercy and yet so much joy and vitality, she had nothing to say. Every time I wanted to protest, he sought ways to silence her. So I got used to being carried away by the current of his unbridled

enthusiasm for what he was doing at the moment.

When they finally escorted her to the boat, Ginny was exhausted and sore. She said as much in the car that took them to the pier and he just burst into laughter, slyly pinching her breasts.

- Ah ... So they will remember me for a while ... I feel really losing it! If he could face a relationship, or their consequences, I would have liked to stay with you for a while. But my job requires me to be constantly in motion. Will now have such a low opinion of the Russians?

He kissed her noisily before the car stopped, lifted the heavy veil that covered a cozy hat. But when I walked her to the boat, his conduct was proper and formal, as had been the first time they had seen.

"In a way," said Ginny was surprised when I went down to his cabin, "I will miss him really. After all he gave me just what was needed. Pure Sensualism not intended to be something else! "

He undressed and went to bed, feeling the ship creaked and swayed beneath her. How tired I was! How many more days ahead would? But it was something to think about it later.

Chapter 40

When Ginny arrived, having telegraphed, France was covered by light fogs of late spring. Freshness and pastels after heat flares and color, lights and shadows of the Mediterranean countries.

France ... with accents and familiar voices and the excitement grew inside him to meet others at the station. Mexico had been his home ever. But that was over. Would this be your home now? "I will make choices after watching the twins and to be back at the castle," said Ginny. Pierre was there! And Celine! Had brought their children? His sudden urge to see them was like a big vacuum, without realizing it, expect to be filled. Quite naturally not recognize ... They were so young yet! Now I devote all his time and then ...

- There you are! Pierre, excited, leaned over to kiss her. I will take your luggage ...

He was wrapped in the welcoming embrace of Celine aunt who wet the face with her tears. Auntie Celine always cried!

- Where is Richard? We were so intrigued ...

"Later I will tell the whole story. There is no reason to worry. Do you realize how good I am? I really enjoyed sunbathing ...

- Go! Pierre shouted behind them.

She glanced at her mother's warning that continued wiping her eyes.

"We'll talk in the car," said Pierre without any apparent need.

The urged to leave the platform without giving him time to protest Ginny. But why was the hurry?

- How are ...?

- Here it is! Ginny Joseph do you remember? Upload you with Mom I'll take care of everything else, eh? There is plenty of room for your trunks.

With a sigh he fell on the comfy velvet cushion.

- What's good to be home again! "We're staying in Paris or go right to the castle? I am impatient to see the twins ... They must have grown so much!

"Yes ... yes ... at least a few inches.

Auntie Celine seemed upset and wanted to Pierre with his eyes.

- Are you all right? The last time I wrote ... but that was several months ago. Turkish Mail is not very fast so to speak. So do not sent the letter I had written.

- Darling! What happened? ...

Celine aunt's eyes were covered with tears as he bent to take the hands of Ginny.

She shrugged indifferently.

- What is what always happens? ... Richard was very affectionate at first ... But living in a harem, for me it was like being in prison and after a while decided ... decided it was better to get rid of these walls. He could not leave because the sultan was infatuated with

him and that meant ...

He realized he was talking too much and too fast, trying not to give much importance to what he said, and his aunt and was advised ... Ginny was a relief to finally meet them Pierre, slammed the carriage door that was put in motion immediately.

- Well, here we are!

The forced cheerfulness of his words was too obvious. Ginny frowned, giving him a look.

Pierre, what happens? You know I can hide nothing! Auntie, what happens?

Looked from one to another and felt no air was asking breathlessly:

"No ... it is nothing of the children, right? ... Oh, for God's sake, tell me!

"The kids are perfectly ... Perfectly! For all the saints in heaven, no women like to think the worst thing ever!

The harshness of the tone of Pierre, unusual for him, Ginny was blinking.

"Well ... then ... obviously something is wrong. Why not tell me what this is? If there are children ... Where are they?

Aunt Celine did nothing but wring the fine lace handkerchief between her chubby fingers, not daring to look at her niece.

It was Pierre who had to answer while stretching their legs with a sigh.

"Well, Ginny, you must not forget that ... Finally, children are in England. I think ... And you need not worry ... I am sure they are perfectly manicured.

- In England? "The voice grew louder and stared in disbelief. In England? ... Repeated suddenly, without knowing whether he had heard correctly. But ... But what are they doing in England? How ...?

Aunt Celine began to pout.

- We could do nothing to stop it, Ginny! After all, his father and had a warrant ...

Pierre's cut short, forcing Ginny to turn to him, feeling that the neck was about to break the tension of the nerves.

"Ginny, what Mom and I are trying to tell you, half stammering words, is that your husband has the kids, Steven Morgan continued with caution and a touch of irony in his voice to see how she opens her eyes - is ... is a very determined man ... But believe me, I would have faced if he had not taken all precautions beforehand legal case. You know that we did not expect!

"We could not stop them from taking their own children, my love, though I did everything possible to talk to him and convince him. But you still y. .. y. ..

The enormity of what they were saying, suddenly hit her like a knife, making her sit up with hands clasped.

- Ah! That had to be exactly the vile and despicable baseness he was capable of committing! It is a ... is a ... My children! They are my children! I gave them to light and he ... he did not even bother to meet them! And now ... oh ...! How well does the role of hypocrite! But will not get away with it! He paused for breath, looking shocked face of his aunt and impenetrable Pierre. I'm about to my kids! Do you read? He's not going a. ...! Did he ask where was I?

It was Pierre who answered as tactfully as possible.

"This ... this ... apparently knew. Everything you said is very happy expecting you ... There is a man whose thoughts are easy to guess, Ginny. Him ..

- Oh yes! That's true, I know very well ...!

She felt as if struck by lightning. Steven ... Dare to use children to avenge her! I wanted to kill him, stick a dagger in the heart of stone! It was possible to do so when he found it!

He wept with rage and blind arrogance. Pierre put his arm around Celine and aunt offered her a clean handkerchief.

"I want ... I know everything, "she said between sobs, all ... Where has my children what they want to do with them all!

Slowly she coming across the story, told mostly by Pierre that,

being a man, was more explicit.

Steven had come unexpectedly with some friends. One of them was forced to admit Pierre, was a very attractive young American woman.

"But there's nothing between them, I'm sure, because the formidable mother watches. It's beautiful, her hair the color of autumn leaves.

By this time Ginny had managed to recover a little and said through clenched teeth:

- Strongly Steven! ... And you look pretty amazed by this American beauty ... And tell me, how many more women hauls? What about the opera singer?

Pierre had the idea of incentives.

"Well, naturally did not ask! But I've heard that have been seen together in Paris. And I think she went to England a few days ago

...

"Yes, of course, the Concepcioncita is there too ... You should not slaughter the poor!

Furious, unable to sit still sitting, Ginny began to pace the room, stopping to look accusingly at his cousin.

"And you, Pierre, you're a lawyer, right? And did you let me steal from my children without lifting a finger to stop it?

"Ginny, I told you it was all legal! And after all, they are also sons-. Al see how he looked, made in jest as if to defend herself. Well, okay, I promise to do everything possible to help you! And if so will you ask Michel. I swear I still feel a tendresse raving about you! But what will you do, Ginette? I hope you do not act too rashly ...

Ginny took a deep breath clinging to the table against which she leaned. Pierre was looking at her, thought that at that moment seemed more Russian than ever with those almond eyes that gave off the glow of emerald and tight mouth with a gesture of resolution.

- What shall I do! His voice was sweet as to disarm anyone but

Pierre does not fooled at all. Go to England to see my kids! You will agree with me that at least I have that right ... As for Steven Morgan, who is no longer my husband ...

- Be careful, Ginny! Your divorce proceedings is not finished yet ...

- Has also managed to prevent it? ...

Pierre shook his head very sorry and looked slyly.

"No ... not at all. Instead ... He said he would do everything in his power for the divorce to be completed as soon as possible and he also was considering getting married ... He said children needed a mother ...

A beautiful vase that crashed into the wall just behind Pierre, forced him to stoop. Dieu ... Go go temperament and character! How he had changed his gentle cousin Ginny!

She was used to control their feelings and act very well after planning what he would do ... Almost always ...

When Ginny returned from France, it was with great style. He had completely renovated her wardrobe and jewelry, with his cousin Pierre and another man, a new admirer, also in tow. In the ring finger shone a huge emerald that she was sure would pale smile given that Steven would prompt him to Di Paoli. Frederick Metz, his new conquest, was an immensely rich Swiss banker. He was very happy to be seen in his company and also did not have to make any concessions because they love their sexual desires were directed to the same sex. Although this was a relatively young and handsome man in blond Teutonic version, and the case would ... Steven would serve to impress on what she knew in the depths of his soul that would be a war to death.

- So we go first to London?

Frederick enjoyed this his first venture into the international high society. Since his father had died leaving her entire fortune, had opened new horizons in his life. France had been but a stage in his long journey. And now in London with a wonderful woman that all men envied. Yes, indeed, was enjoying the big!

"Come on in London first, he'd said Ginny with a smile that fooled Herr Metz but his cousin Pierre, who watched with some trepidation, wondering what would this time hidden under the sleeve.

Lord Dalbey-intimate friend of Prince of Wales and a member of the Eccentric Club "had been given one of his houses. Dalbey had decided to go hunting tigers in India, announced dramatically because the lovely Ginette had not surrendered to their requirements.

"I think when you come back," Ginny had promised him, smiling. And he and his broken heart had left, leaving her the house for you to enjoy all the time he wanted.

"I always thought you were going to be an inveterate flirt ... Pierre shook his head, watching his cousin, whose brilliance and sparkling humor made him wonder what had dragged him to follow her to London. Perhaps the belief that he needed a man to watch ... and not just a few of her many admirers whom she managed to make them dance to a whim, but a man who knew well and was able to provide the entanglements in which he could get.

Ginny was touching up her hair and carefully curled hair with lots of art in front of the mirror and only said, raising one shoulder.

- But my dear cousin and friend, I've always been a flirt! Can not imagine what fun it is and is not criticism! What is critical is to be defeated because then one becomes a bad woman and no one's interest. Is it so or not?

She turned to him inviting him to praise his new style of street, trying to cajole the view that looked sternly.

- Oh, Pierre, try to understand! I know that it strikes you as capricious and independent but I am so what can I do? You know very well what I came to London and what I Dalbey gallant with the poor to get us to leave the house ... And now here we are ...

"Yes, here we are ... And I do not make any blunder that could tarnish your reputation! Pierre continued sternly, "I will not lecture

you, dear cousin, but the English are not liberal half of the French ... so everyone will have fun in France ... If you intend to recover the child, take care not to get good public opinion against ... By little you care!

Ginny got serious and pursed her lips.

"I know ... And I promise that I will be really very discreet everything I can.

He saw the maiden come with a sigh of relief and bent to support his cheek against Pierre.

"I'll make a series of purchases so that they may return later. But going to the theater tonight eh?

I knew Pierre to go left full of apprehension about her. For a while it affected a slight feeling of guilt. But anyway, there were things that were better than Pierre did not know! It had become so formal and judicious ...

Chapter 41

Ginny had come to London without the noise and the first week went very quiet without making public appearances. If he went out frequently during the day, assured him that Pierre went shopping. He himself had promised he would do everything possible to find out where Steven and her children resided.

But Pierre was now frankly worried. Ginette was up to something, he knew too much to get wrong. For example, when he learned that Steven was staying home with the children of Marwood Viscount and his beautiful Spanish wife, accepted the news calmly too.

- Ah, so it is with Concepcion ...! He was to imagine in the y. .. also in it! I wonder what they will do with the poor Marwood ... The announcement that the opera Carmen would be presented this week at Covent Garden with Francesca Di Paoli in the lead role, only caused him to say casually:

- Oh, really? We have to get places.

After the explosions of anger that Pierre had a chance to witness in

France, the apparent docility of serenity and Ginny was almost ominous. It was hoped that was not the calm before the thunder! When Herr Metz, who was staying at the Hotel Claridge, came to visit and was disappointed not to find Ginny, Pierre said casually: - Never at home in the evenings! And right now would have to give a message ... Have you no idea? ...

Frederick shrugged an imagined lint brushing his immaculate black suit cloth.

"Not really. Unless you are still posing for the portrait that such Alma-Tadema was determined to paint. I understand it is a famous painter. Member of the Royal Academy and others ...

The house of Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema in Grove End Road, had become the favorite haunt of Ginny, who had become very good friends with the painter's redheaded wife and daughters. As for the portrait ... Well, not exactly a formal portrait Ginny already cost him a little explaining to Pierre who was posing half naked for a painting that was to be called "A gift to the sultan. Naturally perched looking down as if embarrassed and his face shrouded in shadows. But for those who knew her well, the resemblance was unmistakable. And until that day when I was putting the finishing touches to her artwork, the painter had not said a little sheepishly, that the Prince of Wales was interested in buying the painting.

"I told you that after it has been presented, of course. And again I say it's been a real pleasure to have her as a model. And his descriptions of what a ... this ... inside a harem have been very useful ... but very useful. For my other work you will have realized how painful attention to detail I give you ...

It was easy to stay there and let the mind fly, thought Ginny. By now he was used to fine gauze shirt (so different from today's fashion!) That left transparent to the nipples of the breasts and still finest harem pants subject to the hips by a belt of coins gold. The Moors are eunuchs who were supposed to be so holding, leaving

helpless, would be painted later.

"I hope you get mad," thought Ginny and immediately sought to erase from his mind the idea. He was not going to spoil the day thinking about Steven and had more important things in his hands. There was news of Bulgaria. The details that the newspapers were much more dramatic than that so lightly had told the Russian colonel. With much delay by the time it took to get to London the news of Istanbul, the Times announced that day that the Sultan Abdul Aziz was deposed and the Ottoman throne had been occupied by his nephew Murad. With the best will his friends talked him everything they read on Turkey, knowing he had resided there for a while.

"Richard" thought Ginny ... And they asked him if he was cold, if I wanted to put another log on the fire ... He shook his head, smiled politely while still preoccupied with her things. Richard ... What would you be doing now? Would you leave Gulbehar to come after her? Or would be stronger their sense of responsibility towards the woman carrying his child in the womb? The truth was that ...

Ginny took a deep breath and closed his eyes trying to be honest with yourself. The truth was that all those months had passed without Richard did not seem more than a nebulous dream! It was the voice that forced her out of unconsciousness and despair. He had given love, security and wisdom. His expert hands had met their senses when it was needed. He had tried to protect it against all adversities and misfortunes to the last minute ... I always appreciate, always! But as a thorn in his past, listened to the words that Michel Remy had thrown in his face in his room at the small house they shared in Mexico:

- Gratitude! I do not want your gratitude! ...

No, Michel wanted his love and she could not pass it because I was in love with ... of a 'ghost', as he said.

"I did not know what love was," said Ginny was grim. "Maybe I did not know and never will never know. It's just an illusion ... a dart with which people hurt each other. "

- Ginny ... How sad you are!

The eldest daughter of Sir Lawrence who was almost the same age, looked worried.

- Are not you excited about the idea of going to the theater tonight? He says he will go the Prince of Wales. Dad has made the scenery! I would have liked to go tonight but Dad says he has many things to do and we'll go next week.

Ginny thanked God for being able to chat superficial and tried to smile, to return to this and why was there. During his time at the workshop, they talked about the controversial Oscar Wilde and his play "The Importance of Being Earnest" which had fallen on London like a thunderclap.

"I have a surprise for you," said Pierre when he came home that afternoon. I hope you do not mind, "he continued as he does not like things. I invited two other friends to the theater and I booked a table in the private rooms Romano to dine later. Frederick was here earlier and said he would return at seven o'clock.

Pierre looked at his watch before telling:

"That gives you exactly one hour and a half to dress, dear cousin. You think you the fix you?

Ginny was already heading toward the stairs, relieved that he did not ask questions.

- Of course I can manage! But who have you invited? Do people I know?

He was already halfway up the stairs and did not hear very well response. Not caring too, continued to rise. Trusting Pierre to choose friends! ... It was rare that you will catch but it was so overly sociable ... In short, not long to know.

For some reason Pierre seemed in a hurry. Ginny had only to go down, pulling her skirt down the stairs and thanking with a nod the fulsome compliments of Herr Metz by how well suited her clothing, when Pierre, pulling back the clock, announced that the

car's expected and must leave at once but want to be late. Ginny's dress was of pearl gray fault, richly edged with bands of scarlet velvet and dark gray.

She picked up her tail around her wrist and was carried to the carriage hastily without resistance but once seated it asked Pierre, what is it? Who are these people going to expect you so concerned?

"They're friends of mine. Mother and daughter. Parecía a little annoyed. American Son ... Well, actually the mother is French, a relative of the Marquis de Mora.

They were nothing more than Prendergast, as he could find itself Ginny. Françoise Steven and Lorna who had escorted personally to Europe. And Lorna, who wore a dress as fashionable as the same Ginny, was a real beauty.

Pierre How could you do that? And without warning! At least he had invited Steven to be joining! Extreme kindness with the two women - what Pierre would have told her? - Who watched with great curiosity but devoted most of its attention to Frederick that he was very flattered. As always expected there were many eyes turned toward them because people relative newcomer to London society.

- Who are they? It is rare to see so many gorgeous women together ... Lucky are those that accompany! ...

- Is not the young American heiress? I heard that Marlow is crazy about her but that her mother watches closely.

"Some say it is already committed to an American. They were at Ascot.

During the first intermission, the Knights stood up to bring refreshments to the ladies. The gas lamps were copper glow and crystals of the Haymarket Theater. Lorna Prendergast, defying his mother with his eyes, leaned over an empty seat to tell Ginny:

- Did you bother to ask him frankly if he is still married to Mr. Morgan? I have heard that in France the divorce proceedings are much shorter than elsewhere but still ...

- Of course, openness does not bother me! Ginny replied in a soft voice. And to tell the truth, I'd want to know. I mean if our divorce is completed or not. But, if I may be equally frank ... What do you care?

Lorna smiled, turning to lean back in his seat. Her mother just looked at her as saying, "what rude little girl '...

"Mr. Morgan, Steven, is a very attractive man. I know a lot of women who would be crazy to marry him if I were free.

Ginny turned to smile at the girl's red hair.

- Oh yes! Said in a clear voice, I am sure that many women find attractive Steven. And he echoes it to any ... not talking about getting married naturally. As far as I'm concerned I have finally bored of his series of mistresses ... Especially since I run into them everywhere ... Have you ever known you to Concepcion?

He had the satisfaction of seeing Lorna turned red with rage, before the arrival of Pierre and Frederick with refreshment would end the "lively" dialogue. During the remainder of the second act, Ginny missed the symposium held at the sparkling start the work. Steven Fucking! Of how many things would make them accountable! ...

Steven Morgan had just arrived in London from the port of Southampton after he had to make a long journey junk before landing there. He was tired, hungry and angry and the prospect of sitting down to write a long and detailed letter to his grandfather did not appreciate him in his present mood. But I knew I had to. Abdul Aziz, deposed Sultan of Turkey, had committed suicide by slashing his wrists with scissors. His concubine-Mihri Hanoun, also died, they said, in labor. Murad, the new Sultan, had been declared insane and Abdul Hamid was appointed to the throne. They were news that most people in Europe was still ignorant, but naturally enough, Don Francisco and his wife would be worried about the fate that might come his son, Lord Tynedale.

The phlegmatic English butler that led to Steven at the house he had rented in London for himself and his friends, informed him that the ladies had gone to the theater and would come back late after dinner.

"If the chef is up yet," said Steven I also welcome dinner. Something cold enough for me. What I want to get warm is something to drink. You can bring it all on a tray to my studio. Of course not expecting it. I had told Prendergast that the thought of spending a season on the field with children. Anyway, the butler did not give the slightest sign of surprise or dismay.

-Kindle the fire in the study immediately. Everything else will be ready soon, sir.

The pretty girl who went to light the lamps, reminded the Joanna Steven was so popular among singles in the parental home. He dared the same air and know everything. And for some strange reason-perhaps because he was so terribly tired also reminded Ginny. Ginny, that of the fake green eyes by this time must have a safe place, safe in the court of St. Petersburg. Steven realized he was making gestures of disgust and the shameless girl slipped away from the room looking over his shoulder.

- Oh .. "Commented below. Yes he was in a bad mood, master! Steven tore the sheet of paper he had begun writing and threw it into the fireplace. Ginny Damn! Hoping not having to run after her any more! What he had done had not God's forgiveness and, as before, was thinking about her. Thinking that he had given up for dead and had wept for her! And until she had felt guilty ...

Remember only wore a foul mood. It was just a whore provocative and irritating able to go with the first one was ... Luckily she had escaped! ...

The second sheet of paper followed the path of the first. The butler carrying a tray of cold dishes beautifully presented, sweets, cakes and other vegetables with vinaigrette as she liked Mr. Morgan stumbled in the door of the studio with Mr. Morgan himself, with his coat draped over her shoulders a kind of layer, leaving at that

time.

"Sorry, Ross. I'll go back out. Surely not again until tomorrow morning. Do you want to tell you please?

Steve hopes to see some sign of surprise or disgust on his face stern and pale man, but the butler was unmoved.

"Certainly, sir. I wish you good evening, sir.

Wow! No doubt the man had mistaken his vocation. It would have been a great poker player, able to beat Bishop ...

It occurred to him that night to tempt fate red and black. Francesca always brought him luck in the game and he knew where he could find at that hour of the night. Once you stop talking to shoot him, stick a dagger or throwing at his head a heavy glass object, it would certainly an entertaining evening together. It would certainly much nicer than staying at the fire without seeing more than an endless series of witch with green eyes and coppery hair.

Chapter 42

- Hopes that you know is here! -Lorna Prendergast told his mother his eyes glistening topaz. Expects to know about! What do you think, Mom?

Françoise-for whom the night had been so difficult and strange to her daughter sighed.

"Ma cherie, who can say? What I have to admit is that she is not what I expected. It is very beautiful and has genius. It's a shame you can not understand one. Perhaps ...-. Lorna looked at that was about to whine-it is perhaps time that we go home. I must confess that I begin to miss your father and the boys. And the purity of air and open skies. I had forgotten how small and narrow that it can be Europe and not really interested in London fog.

- But, Mom! I have barely begun to enjoy myself! Mr. Dumont has invited me to visit the Crystal Palace. And next week the Opera. Please, Mama!

- Sometimes, Lorna, seems to continue being a girl! Pierre Dumont is a cousin of Mrs. ... Ginny is a cousin. Heavens! Did you ever

know if she and Mr Morgan are still married or not?

"Well, Lorna reluctantly confessed as she brushed her hair, the truth is I do not mind ... I hardly notice has been taken since ... since that Italian opera singer came on stage. I only said what I said and see what answer ... And anyway, I like her cousin. He is attentive, a gentleman y. .. really do not think luck is behind me, Mom. Not to brag but man, did you notice ...?

While Lorna and her mother were talking, Ginny also was awake, tossing and turning in bed, suddenly, it was too big and too soft. What a night of tension! Only by Pierre had endured to the end, trying to be polite with that bitch lengüilarga. He frowned in the dark. She had failed to find anything about Steven, but, thanks to Lorna's mother, who maintained the relationship with Francesca Di Paoli. And Conception. How dare to leave their children in the care of Concepcion, among all women of this world? Her heart hurt to think about them. For more than a year since I saw them and children have so little memory ... Without having to Aunt Celine or close to Pierre surely recall and would have forgotten it. And Steven, why he suddenly so interested in them when they first refused to recognize the poor creatures? But that was typical of Steven. It was obvious that was so unpredictable and so variable as ever. It was hoped that would not have to see him again in life. If people that Frederick had hired their own lists were half of what they were supposed to, he'd have his children with her and would be way ... probably best not even go to St. Petersburg for a while. The czar, his father would be delighted to see this and, at least there would be outside the scope of Steven.

"No problem" he had said Frederick, I am able to hire the best people, which our major customers for their business use. They are true professionals, I assure you, and nobody will suffer harm-.and inquisitive tone continued: "Unless you want ...

Ginny blushed. Does the thought capable of being vindictive? He

avoided answering directly, saying to Frederick that his men warned him that Steven was an opponent who had to be taken into account.

"It has come to make a living as a mercenary y. .. despite appearing almost a fop for its elegance, is as ruthless as a savage fight when. And above all do not want children to be afraid.

Frederick Metz smiled patting her shoulder.

- No need to worry, I promise! Avoid any kind of damage, even to her former husband's gross ...

Was there something you did not like the way these last words, but had to shut up because she had warned him not to speak of the matter if Pierre entered the room. Frederick had insisted that Pierre did not know anything because I was sure he would have objected. When Ginny finally fell into a restless sleep mingling unpleasant moments of his past that his conscience was clear, the fog across the windows of the room was becoming more tenuous as the dawn came.

A few streets away, a lonely and elegant carriage stopped in front of the luxury apartments occupied by the Princess Di Paoli. A sleepy footman opened the door for her and her companion. Once in his room fired its maiden Constance grumpy as he looked with an air of frank criticism, directing his eyes at the same time with deep antipathy to the man he called his wife Stefano.

"So again ... And as always no other prospects than new troubles. I prefer the Duke even English. At least not a Banditt of a wild country where everyone is armed ...

Steven broke into laughter, whereupon Constance, still looking at him, made a gesture to ward off surreptitiously "the evil eye.

- Oh, go at once, Constance! Muttering, always mumbling ... I have had enough! I undress myself. Or better yet, my Banditt help me, okay? And tomorrow morning, do not forget not want anyone to disturb me earlier.

When the door slammed behind her, the two stood facing each other. In the dark, large eyes Francesca reflected the candlelight.

"Well ... Here I am with you when in fact they should be with the poor Albert. You mean to me, Stefano! "With graceful grimace turned away, shrugging his shoulders. Over here! You'll have to help me as I fired my poor Constance ... I hate whales!

Feeling that his fingers touched the back, could not repress a shudder of desire. He was an animal, like her. When I was with him back to being herself and not an actress playing a role. They had known each other almost too much! With a sigh she leaned against Steven while her expensive dress fell to the floor with a rustle of silk. But he was equally beautiful. The mirror and the eyes of men who languished at her can tell you!

He unbuttoned his vest and she sighed to feel liberated.

- Oh, what a relief! See? I do not even need. My waist is as narrow ...

She turned her breasts pressing against him while his hands began to undress as well.

"And you, you have not changed anything. I love your body, Stefano ... It is so hard and so ... so fierce ... Yes .. yes ... now, now! ...

After a while the candles, drowned in its own wax. And two of them, that their bodies had played the old bulls of love, fell asleep. Through the heavy velvet that carpeted ruby Francesca's bedroom, daylight struggled unsuccessfully to enter.

They woke up after noon and, as usual, was then started talking.

- I see you again soon or ever again? You're father ... have two children ... I find it so strange! Not made for this, Stefano! Are you going to marry you again? Did you get you out of this red head wife of yours? Apparently you like redheads ... That other woman you saw ... What's it called?

Until not long after he realized that, as always, it was she who had spoken more. All he had said was that that night would go to London for a few days and bring back to children and the nanny with him.

- You think you again soon? What the United States or Mexico?

Will you remarry?

Answering that question surprised her while his fingers ran down the contour of the breasts, belly and I went up the body up until he started breathing heavily.

"I have to leave early, Cesca. I've been here long enough and I want my children to know their home is elsewhere. I want to take where there is more range, more open space. But I miss-.Le winked. You would not be a good wife, good mother or a face.

- Ja! ... Nor have I failed to notice that you've asked me. But no matter, to dance .Empezaron eyes. Albert's always! What do you think? You let me make love or hope to a certain Edward? I ordered a ruby in a bouquet of carnations! How clever! But I just missed shot!

With the black eyebrow raised, Steven asked:

- Who, Prince of Wales? Nothing less! Although their passions are not very durable. It may be useful to keep in reserve-.and Albert as an afterthought, "Next time remind me to send you white roses ... each with a pearl in the center and an extra for you to put them here.

- Ah! Yes, I would love, love. I tease, Stefano!

When he left, with some regret, were the first afternoon. While they were together, Francesca always managed to keep him distracted.

Returning to his lodgings, Steven found that the ladies had gone out again. They would spend the evening outside, but expected to find upon their return. A point of asking where they went, Steven hesitated and shrugged. If failed to find them would leave a note. The most important thing was to go to Devon this afternoon as planned. Steven had always had a sixth sense to foresee the dangers, was recently disturbed and the letter was waiting not only increased their concern.

Once it was decided, the letter to his grandfather left him a jerk without having to think too much. It lacked not only seal, leave a brief note to the ladies and be ready to go. For a difference of two

hours was not found with Prendergast and not the news reached him so eagerly wanted to give them.

"In two weeks he will be back," said Françoise left the note on the table after reading it. Not too long with everything you need to do here if we must be prepared to arrive with the children and the governess. My dear, I had promised to accompany you to the Tower but we've been so back and forth all the time, I feel an obligation to take care that everything is in order on his return. Do not forget to watch what Mr. Morgan was escorting us out here!

"Well, it's the least I could do after dad left alone accept these unfortunate friends of his.

Lorna was expressing his resentment but shortly after his mother touched his hand apologetically:

- Oh, Mama, forgive me! I just can not hide my disappointment! I do everything I can before returning and I love all this ... although not as much as France became .Su gaze dreamily. Mom! May I come anyway? With Mr. Dumont will go very safe. I promise to be good and you know he also ... Please!

"I think ..." said her distracted mother, surprising Lorna, continued: "Do you think it will already be aware that she is here? I can not stop thinking about what will happen when they meet. And these poor creatures ...

Lorna finally got his mother to let her make a way out. Françoise, who, after the talk had been exhausted, he insisted on retiring for a while and allowed her daughter to be accompanied by the maid, was with Mr. Dumont to see the paintings in the Royal Academy. Pierre was there that he learned with consequent embarrassment to what kind of portrait had been posing her cousin during those days. People had swirled before the last painting by Alma-Tadema. Some commented that the paint was still fresh! Pierre immediately recognized the model and tried to distract Lorna was pointing to another table a little later. But he had become so red, that Lorna

could not help noticing. He sought the earth swallow him when he saw how wide open the eyes of the maiden also realize who the odalisque. Ginny had gone too far this time and was going to say! Yes, and no longer leave would mix in his deception!

- Oh ... Lorna said squeezing her arm, "what will have been worth? What little consideration with you! Go and see as soon not talk about anything else in London!

Not even the satisfaction that he cared about Lorna managed to placate the anger of Pierre against Ginny. I had no idea what he was doing. Distracted by Lorna deal had neglected his duties to his cousin. No it should have been allowed to be banded one in London. Now insist that accompany him back to France immediately.

It was Lorna who made him think there was a concern even bigger. - Oh, Mr. Dumont ... Pierre ...! Acelerándosele said breath when he realized that he had called by his first name. What will happen if Steve comes out? They may be almost divorced so she dares to do such a thing, but ... with the temperament he has ... It is natural to worry about what this might mean for these two poor creatures ... Dieu! I had not thought about it ... Lorna was right!

- There is nothing to do! His voice expressed more confidence than truly felt. Instead I will explain everything to me Steven. It's better than finding out for myself than for a stranger.

In his heart he prayed God that at that time Ginny was not mixed in some other crazy adventure.

Chapter 43

Ginny was having a good little guessing what was coming. It had long since mounted his horse and was delighted when Frederick suggested the idea. Strolling through the park! Its elegant riding habit was striped in different shades of golden brown, edged with green silk ribbon and gold. Complete his grograin green necktie. A veil of gauze wrapped around his tone beaver hat. I was very aware of the admiring glances directed to men while pretending to

ignore, devoting full attention to Frederick which, in turn, felt very satisfied.

"We do very good match.

They had stopped in the shade of the trees to give some rest to the horses. Faced with this demonstration Ginny looked surprised and he went timidly

"Ginny ... I know I'm ... I know what it was ... But you're the first woman to go with long ... And this is the first whose friendship and conversation draws me ... I even like ... "suddenly blushed and laughed," I'd like to make love! ... Well, I said!

"But Frederick ...

He did not know what to say and began to bite his lip with his little white teeth. When she had caught, he decided to take her hand.

"I'm asking to be my wife. And any way I hope to answer me now. But I would want children to know that y. .. Beyond that I will not be too annoying for you. Will have available more than enough income to spend at will and always have more when needed. And if at times we decided not to attend prefiriéramos bed and others ... well, that would be no problem if we are wise, right? Discretion ... Steven recalled angrily that he had said the same. Discretion! But it applied only to her, not him. Do not want to spoil the day thinking again Steven or what would have happened if someone had removed the children.

As if at least in part could have read what I was thinking, Frederick Metz leaned over and said carefully:

"During this day you may hear from their children. I told you not to worry! After you, when you have calmed down, is willing to give me an answer.

"Yes," he said. Then I will give an answer. And thank you, Frederick.

Herr Metz had left their hotel rooms to move into a home. Ginny

had used to visit him freely. He had done that afternoon to remove his riding habit while Metz waited patiently in the next room, reading the newspapers which had just received from Switzerland. Frederick was actually very nice and it might be the kind of guy who you could get married. No hassle, no demands, and very rich, by the way ...

He sighed, wondering why he sighed, and began to fix her hair before the mirror, make efforts to think only of the commitments that were pending for the rest of the day. Hence I had to go to Bond Street to try on an evening gown that had been specially commissioned for the opera. If the suit was ready right there and could be changed would be dressed for dinner that Frederick had promised him before going to the Palace Theater. They went to see a variety show where they played such popular figures as Lottie Collins, the Sisters Levy and Marie Lloyd.

Ginny could not help but smile thinking of Pierre would face if he knew. She shocked the music halls or "music hall" as he called them, "although the Prince of Wales and his friends in the Eccentric Club regulars were competing and were always on the doors of the clubhouse waiting to witness the exhibitions. Poor Pierre! I should have sent a note but he was accustomed to leaving infested with and it was busy accompanying her mother Lorna and forth.

"I'll take her where to go now and then look again," she said Frederick shaking hands to help her get into a stylish cabriolet. When he emerged with his dazzling new night-dress him so he said later, true to his word, Frederick was waiting.

- Did not I tell you everything go well?

Ginny read the telegraphic message he had stretched and looked confused. Frederick laughed.

"It's the code we had agreed. "Johnnie and Sarah recovered, ready to return to school." That means that everything went exactly as planned and you may soon be reunited with their children.

Ginny took a deep breath.

- When? ... Whispered and said unable to hide the emotion, "And there was ... you think it was necessary to use violence?"

An expression of ... "Satisfaction?" crossed the face of Frederick.

Ginny hesitated so quickly that if he had not imagined.

Petulant air replied:

"No, I think ... unless it has been necessary. And I'm sure there will be no need for. The important thing is that their children are safe and will soon be in the arms of his mother. Le smiled. Soon, dear. Very soon. It is important that you act that night as usual, as if he knew nothing. Tomorrow morning, tell your cousin is going to come back out to ride horses and come to my house. From there we travel to where their children are waiting.

Ginny was silent, too shocked to speak. It was hoped that everything would have been so easy at the end. For some strange reason, I now had the nerves to the surface.

- I imagine the relief you must feel!

He helped her into the carriage that was waiting and when he was in motion, he said very wisely:

"It may be appropriate for us to go to Ireland, okay? For a few days ... Until you decide where to go. I dare to hope you choose to go to Switzerland. It is a beautiful country, you'll see. And very healthy for kids!

"Yes," Ginny mechanically, it is safe. Might be a good idea if ... if they follow me.

By the time Frederick leaned back comfortably on the velvet upholstery of the carriage, Ginny thought he saw the same expression of previously crossed the handsome face of her companion.

- Oh ... I do not think there are reasons to worry about that, "he added .and reassuring to catch his eye helpless," Do not worry, I'm perfectly capable of ensuring you. I carry a gun and a sword with me and I know they handle well reputation.

For Ginny the rest of the night passed amid the joy and carefree.

He drank champagne, ate snacks of caviar and champagne to drink

again during intermissions, like everyone else laughing at jokes and bawdy picaresque songs. During one of the intermissions met with a group of people who barely knew Ginny were together after dinner. Later, slightly drunk, Ginny thought it was an evening deliciously vulgar, just what I needed tonight.

- Yes, dear! Approved Frederick-friendly tone.

When the car started and began jogging on the pavement, Ginny leaned her head on his shoulder and he, putting his arm around, timidly began to touch her breasts, almost daring discovered under the neckline of her new evening gown.

"Why let the men take liberties with me every time I have champagne?" Thought Ginny. But as he began to feel drowsy, it would have been too much effort to get rid of him and let him do. After a while, a little annoyed, he left and just hold her in his arms. What was the long way home! Ginny fell asleep, woke up and went back to half-asleep and said with difficulty:

- I would drink more champagne!

Without a word, Frederick did receive a bottle-still frozen-hidden under the seat in front of them.

- See? I can accommodate all your wishes! "He said gallantly.

Had Frederick appreciated as he deserved?

He tried to tell between sips of champagne and fits of giggles. He smiled and patted his shoulder.

- But if it is you who has brought laughter and excitement to my life ... While dad lived was all study, study, work, work. Now you've learned to have fun, okay?

"Everyone should have fun and everyone should learn to laugh.

Ginny spoke trying to remember what not to think. Perhaps it was better not to remember. I'd always rather be happy than sad.

I was finishing another glass of champagne and tried to start explaining to Frederick - Frederick dear and kind! - When she heard him say:

"Well, here we are. I hope there's someone up for it. Wait until it is, of course.

- Oh, Pierre is going to be mad ... Would not it be better than you came to explain? ... Whether you are polite and take all the blame ...

- Yes! The assume.

He took her to the door holding her trying to stop laughing if Pierre heard her and fell to scold.

"I have to call," he said, so someone has to know. Do not call too loud to not hear Pierre.

The brass knocker resounded with such force that Frederick blinked.

- God! And now I have hiccups ... If I drank a little champagne on the other side of the cup? My old nurse always said ...

- I do not think it advisable to take more champagne! -Frederick had adopted a stern tone and Ginny winked.

- I hope you do not put heavy now!

She knocked again and almost immediately heard someone drew back the bolts on the inside.

- See? Someone is awake. They get me more champagne if you do not.

I almost fell face down in the lobby if a firm hand had not caught by the arm, keeping it straight.

"Frederick, you promised to go remember? Let's drink more champagne ...

And then, as if it came from the depths of their darkest nightmares, he heard the voice I least expected to hear at that moment, he said politely:

"But do me the favor of passing, Herr Metz. Why should I assume that you Herr Metz, right? And please close the door when it is over.

When he felt let go to lift the lamp, Ginny was suddenly quite sober as if someone had thrown a bucket of ice water on top.

- Steven? ...

It was barely a whisper to the incredible. Ginny leaned against the wall, holding his hands to keep right.

- Do not expect to see me alive?

His tone was cold and biting, like a sharp knife to cut the nerves leaving her paralyzed.

It was Frederick who spoke:

"You are your ... its ...

Seeing him hesitate, Steven interrupted cutting, all his attention focused on him now.

"Your husband. Yes, I'm afraid so. For the moment at least. It was very nice of you to bring Ginny back home, Herr Metz. Should I assume that you are always so kind to her in other ways?

- How are you here? I will not let it hurts!

She was completely unable to move or even to think. With eyes wide he saw Frederick put his hand into his pocket and pulled out the gun. And he saw Steven, without seeming effort but with the speed of a snake that jumps into the attack, instantly disarmed him throwing the gun behind him.

"Now," said his voice heavy with contempt will he get the sword? It is an arsenal of weapons, Herr Metz! Is it just to protect my wife or to ensure that you be faithful?

- If necessary, "she heard Ginny say in a tone that Frederick had not heard before-I will kill you!

The blade of the sword sinister light shining shimmering with golden lamp flashes.

Steven laughed silently so that Ginny's blood ran cold in my veins.

- Will you finish the task that their hired murderers could not meet?

The hard and concentrated expression of the face suddenly changed Metz Frederick and Steven quipped without taking his eyes from the gleaming steel:

- Oh yes, I know everything! Well, that was on my way to Devon I passed beside the car accident that led to my children. One of them waved from the window, otherwise I would not have noticed.

- Yes? "Said Frederick and went a step further.

Steven did not move. His arms hung loose at his sides but the look

was a lion ready to spring.

"Yes," and as one who does not like things, "I have kids. Ginny should have told me that she was eager to see them. And the other thing, I know what the extra 500 pounds to be paid if they could out of the way gracefully. It was difficult to make him talk.

"He's talking too much ... Is it to lower the guard? It is not going to get! I think it's time to end the string of nonsense you are saying.

The blade of the sword flashed and Ginny screamed:

- No! "Between sobs he tried to make himself understood. You can not do that, Frederick! No, Frederick, is going to kill! I saw ... I saw him kill a man once ... on the deck of a boat! A man who ... it was my husband. Him .. he had the sword and Steven had only their hands clean. But he was killed ... killed him the same! ... Oh, God!

The memory made her put their hands clasped over his mouth to keep from vomiting as he had done that day, on the deck of the boat that rocked, seeing the package broken and bleeding, which had been the prince Sharkanov, lying at his feet.

Frederick Metz hesitated a moment, at that time, relieving the stress they were experiencing all was heard the voice of Pierre Dumont from the height of the stairs shouting:

- What's happening? Frederick, sheathe that sword I suppose, now that you know who this gentleman. I must also ask why my cousin brought home so late.

-Ginny Frederick urged him touching his arm, please, okay. You have to believe me ... y. .. has passed and what happened, I beg your pardon ... It was all my fault.

Pierre descended the stairs with her robe embroidered. With a stern face and without any sympathy looked at Ginny.

"I agree that you must apologize. Then we'll talk in private, is not it, cousin? For now, "Frederick looked inquiringly at that, completely overwhelmed, had started choking back an apology.

"Do not forget your gun Steven reminded him gently.

His eyes were still alight on Ginny and was Pierre who picked up

the small Derringer and handed to its owner.

"I think we can talk more sensibly all morning. The servants are going to wake up at any time, if not already awake, and I think

"He sounded angry, it's time that Mr. Morgan and his wife privately discuss their affairs and their children.

Chapter 44

Frederick had made a rather embarrassing retreat and Pierre - the very traitor - had merely stated wearily office door that opened onto the lobby.

"I suppose you two will like to talk privately despite the hour. Of course they can call if they need anything. And just in case, there are drinks on the sideboard.

He stared at Ginny with a steely gaze that she knew him and continued:

"In my opinion nor my cousin does not need another drop. See you when we have all had a chance to rest a bit and regain composure. Unable to recover and not even thinking about what to say, Ginny found herself alone with Steve in the middle of an icy silence that his stubbornness was becoming heavier.

"I do not do anything, will not dare! And when you can explain everything to Pierre, I understand. What he meant with that of hired murderers to kill him? "

And he kept saying nothing, hearing the crackle of logs in the fireplace. The silence was becoming increasingly tense. Steven was served a drink without offering to her.

How dare enter again in his life so naturally, to get at home like I never left it and treat it as if it had any right to do so? As if he owned it? Ginny's heart began beating violently with fear and rage. Do not let him see how much he was upset and confused! He would not yield, he said what he said and he did what he did, never again being dominated by it!

She saw him turn around with the cup in his hand and forced to hold his gaze caught his, intentional and remote at a time.

Reluctantly, as if seeing it for the first time, could not fail to impress the intensity of the blue eyes of Steven ... The blue shaded by long lashes, seemed even darker. They were two strangers who were measuring each other and Ginny felt chocada to see that he also looked as if seeing it for the first time.

God, but what was most handsome man! Despite, or perhaps because of the thin scar that's sword had left Sharkanov marked on the cheek and another more recently, across his forehead. Ginny was furious with herself for having given way to think and clasped his hands in his lap. He must be aware that Steven knew too well! There was no woman not to look at Steven and, after so long, she was no exception! And even he ... and his eyes were staring betrayed no emotion.

A stab of pain pierced his heart and bit his lip. Steven Fucking never been able to guess the thoughts except on rare occasions that took him off guard. Now what was looking after studying? Why not say something?

They were still without uttering a word as they looked at each other. Ginny felt a slight shudder at seeing the thin white lawn shirt Steven, open at the neck, was stained with blood. Then she felt shock to look at the black wool jacket she was wearing was all tattered and covered with dark spots. It seemed ... seemed to come of the war! And that what she or anyone else might think of his appearance had he not care ...

The least he could do after the shock and embarrassment that he had just passed, was to apologize or give any explanation. While married, had sneered at her, had cheated, humiliated and had even allowed to have an affair with his stepmother prude. Virtually forced her to leave! And he had stolen from the children ...

- Am ... I am so changed as to make me look so much?

He wanted not to be the first to speak ... He wanted to sound not so challenging ... But the words escaped his mouth without his will had intervened at all. Ginny saw Steven shrink the corner of his mouth while he spoke in a voice so calm and peaceful as if talking

to a stranger.

- How could I not see you, ma amie? You're still a young charming even after ... How old are they? Two, three? ... And you're alive ... Do you know which long had you for dead? Delery Andre thought the same. But now he is dead and you're here in person ... You survived, Ginny ... Right?

As he spoke he crossed the desk toward her, with those long strides so well known felines. His fingers, long and brown, brushed his face making him stifle a groan before he could depart straightening his back and lifting her chin.

- Yes, I survived! And obviously you too! Despite ... Can I ask what happened to Andre? O. .. or why are you covered in blood stains?

He regretted to have it than watching, standing before her, his eyes filled with hate. Should it be only her imagination to believe he was hit or choke?

Steven raised an eyebrow and asked softly and lightness:

- Do I understand you're worried ... or frustrated by that?

He laughed a short laugh that made her jump. Why still looking at her that way ... as taking his time and measuring it? He recalled the time that she was asking the same question ... in Mexico had been. It was about a knife he had found in the luggage and he spoke to Matt Cooper ... Did he really know what happened to Andre Delery?

I was so close she almost touched his knees that was too tight. Steven's shadow, cast by the fire, covered her face and shoulders, making her shiver.

- Want to really know? I fought with Andre Delery and emerged victorious ... Is this your first question, no? As for the second ... to the spots that you have drawn the attention ... are a result of ... say that the exchange of views I had with people who had kidnapped my children, Ginny ...

He heaved a sigh of despair and then, while transcending emotion, went on to another subject entirely.

- You know you have the skin as soft and as smooth as I remembered? I look and I see you have not changed much ... But I find a bit dull the sparkle of your eyes and to say that there is some sadness in them. Will not make you too happy I found you with your husband and your children? Should have left you left with your handsome Swiss banker who loves you enough to have killed me if he could? He distanced few steps. I was worried about the men who hired murderers sent to kill me and brandished their pistols and rapiers in my face. But why you wanted to kill me, Ginny? Our divorce is almost over and I would not have objected to your coming marriage, Ginny, if you wanted to marry. The truth is that I had determined not to interfere at all in your business to see you again even if he could help, unless you force me to do it!

...

- You took my children! I did not know ... I knew that Frederick had ...

What odious and untrustworthy was the serenity of his voice controlled!

- Oh yes, Frederick! ...

He dismissed Frederick as if it had ceased to exist. He threw himself into a chair opposite her and said flatly:

"As for children ... also are mine ... Right? At least that's what you told me. And anyway, the fact is that I have taken some ... darling. As for you, dear, for me and everyone was obvious that you had left to pick you up experience to know the delights of a Turkish harem! What do you expect me to do, Ginny? Give up my time after having met?

Suddenly, as if the fight between them would have left exhausted, Ginny leaned back in his chair and clasped his hands clenched in her eyes like a child.

- No, Steven! Do not continue playing cat and mouse with me! Not anymore! ... I'm too tired, you know? I ... I ...

Without giving him time to oppose, Steven took his hands from her eyes that had filled with tears without being able, or wanted,

help.

His voice was as inexorable as the force of his hands.

- You what ... Ginny? For the love of God! Why are not honest with me for once, if only to change? And yourself too, by Christ! You're a woman desperate and miserable! You can tell a mile away! And it's not just kids, either. I think ... Look at me, Ginny! You remove the children you just furious. Perhaps it also gave you a reason to live ... volvérmelos if only to remove and destroy ... Ginny shook her head vehemently denying their insightful reasoning.

- No, you're wrong! And you have no right to complain ... do not have ...

- What is it you have well, Ginny? Is it because of Richard? Do you still love him? Do you feel mortally wounded because you think you repudiate?

He released her hands as fast as they could be had taken. Ginny snuggled on the couch crying as if he had broken his heart.

- Damn!

Steven's voice sounded remote. Through the tears that hid the view, Ginny realized that was up and away from her as if she could not longer bear the vicinity. He heard the bottle when it hits the glass again and the voice inflections and controlled saying

"I just returned from Istanbul, Ginny, and learned that it has not happened. Your Richard and his wife-sister of the late Sultan, have gone to live with her son to Persia. I talked a little with General Ignatiev at that time was about to return to Russia. For he knew that just would leave for France and St. Petersburg ... was not too sure. He also reported the circumstances of your 'divorce' -.

Steven's voice had become dry without letting in the least his emotions. I understand Richard Avery did not divorce you because I wished to but because I was worried about your personal safety. He was also responsible for the woman carrying his child in the womb, not to mention the same child. It seems to be a man of great sensitivity ... A contrast that you must have appreciated a lot!

Ginny could not say whether he had drowned a sketch of protest ... But he found that he put a glass in his trembling hands.

- Here, drink this! "Said Steven roughly. It's cognac, not poison. And you do not cuddle you like a whipped dog. If I'd thought about killing you and I had!

His words struck like a whip. He sat right again and tried to control his voice as the words chose to give the caustic response it deserved. But much to his regret, what he kept saying he kept silent.

"I have in my possession a letter, incidentally still sealed, Richard Avery gave the general Ignatiev. It is addressed to you and I suppose there are some explanations that may make you a little happier than it appears now. I thought your cousin left habérsela but ... since we have found ...

Ginny took a sip of cognac that nearly drowned it runs like a burning liquid down his throat. At least he used to get his voice.

-No. I do not want to read it. I appreciate that you brought. But ... I do not think it makes any sense to read it ... I do not care at all. Through tears made an effort to look at Steven and he found that his dark eyes were looking at too. There was no anger in them, or contempt, or condemnation ... perhaps only a curiosity. It was easier to finish what he meant.

"For a while I loved ... or he made me believe that she loved him. He was affectionate and considerate with me. It made me feel that was the only woman in the world ... protected me and spoiled me. She was blind then y. .. God knows I needed support and understanding. But when it was over ... when it was over I felt empty ... But I felt free! Although I despised for it! You can not understand ...

- Are you sure? He sat down again beside her and drew a deep sigh. Yo also met someone ... His name was ... the name does not matter. I thought you were dead and he blamed me for your death. It was my fucking and exalted pride that made me Delery batiera with Andre. After the match I went to Cuba, I traveled ... and

found.

- Y. ..?

Ginny's voice was barely a whisper. He did not want to break the thin thread of communication that seemed to have established between them. Rather than saw, felt that he turned his head and she watched the fire to look at her.

- Y. ..? Here I am, you see. I asked her to go with me and refused ... in exchange for security and affection, he told me. She meant the calm, the sweetness, the woman who always expects ... All that assumes that a man needs. I could not offer what she wanted ... forever.

Ginny sighed.

- What do you mean "forever"? He added, as if he had to find out "Do you know ... Recuero not know that we have never spoken before? Just words we said to each other. It seems so ... so strange! Steven began to laugh again surprised.

- Yes, the truth is that there seems ... normal! I'm afraid your cousin Pierre will be disappointed. He assumed that I must be deeply disappointed that'd posed for a famous artist ... I understand just a few veils in certain strategic locations ... Only slightly more than the skin and hair. "The slave of the Sultan" ... So is his name? Should I buy?

Suddenly, without knowing why, Ginny felt a huge weight was removed from the chest and I could breathe again ... and to laugh. Although laughter was a little choppy as if it had the hiccups.

"I ... I knew they were going to show so soon! Poor Pierre! ... No wonder I looked like that! As you buy it ... I think the Prince of Wales has already ... Oh, my God!

He drowned with drinking and Steven began to pat him between the shoulders, assuring him that was a proven and effective remedy against the hiccups and that in no way was trying to attack her.

- The Prince of Wales? He asked after raising an eyebrow. Is this another of your fans?

- Oh, admires any attractive woman who crosses him! Variety actresses and opera singers ...

He was speechless when he realized that he was looking ... looking at this man with whom he had met years ago and who, however, did not know. And who wanted to meet ... had discovered as well.

- Ginny ...

Had not taken her hands and felt that they were put in the shoulders and turned toward him. And then for the first time, her eyes looked helpless, as helpless as he had seemed theirs. Nearly blind, reached out to touch her face, running his fingers over the scars of which still had not said anything.

"Yes," she said, turning to deliver full. I knew intuitively that he had a past which would have to take lessons and a future that would need to explore together.

"Forever", he meant a long, very long, he thought as he felt Ginny's stood up and pressed with all his heart against him, raising his face to find questions and answers that his lips were to be .

"Forever" was the future and learning hard to know what it meant to love and being loved. This was to be honest with each other and that tolerance and love. Ginny's arms encircled her neck and pressed it against him while the fire was burning back into oblivion and sunlight made his way through the curtains with neglect.

A new day dawning. He started the "forever".